

A THRILLING DETECTIVE TALE OF THE FAR WEST!

BEADLE'S Dime New York Library

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ENTERED AT THE POST OFFICE AT NEW YORK, N. Y., AT SECOND CLASS MAIL RATES.

Vol. XXV.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y., November 19, 1884.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

No. 317



Frank Lightfoot drew up his feet, using both them and his hands to thrust himself far out from the wall, then shooting down! down!!

PROLOGUE:

WITH THE BRAND OF CAIN.

A LONE log cabin nestling amid rocky crags from the summit of which one might even catch a glimpse of a straggling collection of tents and shanties surrounding a few more pretentious buildings, five-and-twenty miles away: a rough uncouth mining-camp then—now the Queen Jewel of the American Desert, proud and beautiful Denver!

A wild, almost romantic spot, yet with a touch as of home about the lone cabin. The rough slab door was framed in an arch of living green, and the mud-daubed stone chimney at one end of the rude structure, was nearly hidden from view by the masses of mountain vines which a careful hand had trained to lend their graces as a foil to the clumsy touch of man.

Two men before the cabin door, one standing with folded arms, gazing steadily, anxiously down upon the other as he sat on a rough block, his head moodily bowed as his strong hand drove the keen point of a bowie-knife into the insensate wood, only to glance up, his dark face

flushed, his black eyes glittering with a desperate hatred such as ought never to come between brothers born of the same mother.

"A liar, Tom Courtright; a liar and a coward, both!"

"Brother—"

"Never that again, you snake in the grass! Never brother to one who has lived a black lie for years!"

"Will, you are more than unjust, and you will be sorry for those hard words when your brain grows cool. In what have I injured you, more—"

With a short, hard laugh the other arose, flinging his gleaming knife with a force that buried an inch of its point in the hard wood of the block on which he had been sitting.

"How have you injured me? You ask that?" he hoarsely uttered, his eyes aglow, his strong fingers closing and unclosing as though they itched to meet around the throat of his brother. "You have won the woman I loved—the one woman in all the world to me—won her by lies as black as those you have poured into my ears!"

He paused, not that his accusations were at an end, but because his mad passions choked his utterance.

"Never that, Will. I never lied to mortal men, much less you," was the quick, pained response. "It was a fair race between us, but the fates were against you. Edna never loved you, while she did love me. When you failed—when we all saw that there was not a trace of hope remaining for you, in that respect—was I so much to blame for trying my fortune?"

"She swore there was nothing between you!"

"Nor was there, then."

"Yet you say she is your wife—the mother of your child! When were you married?"

"When I took that business trip to Omaha. I went on to St. Louis, and we were married."

"Why did you keep it all from me? Why let me live on in hopes of one day gaining her?"

"We were afraid," came the reply, slowly, the blue eyes downcast, the bronzed cheeks flushing a little. "Your temper is so quick, Will; you are so apt to strike first and think afterward, that Edna made me promise to wait, to break the news to you gradually, when passing time began to weaken your regrets. A score of times I have tried to lead up to the subject, but as often you would flash out, showing so plainly that your love was still living, still steadfast and—"

"Ay!" with a bitter emphasis. "I was not ashamed to show my heart to my brother! I never lied, never licked the hand I was all the time betraying, never—*bah!* you coward! liar!"

That hot flush faded away. The bronzed face grew pale as death, but it was not from personal fear. The large blue eyes flashed fire, and the deep, mellow voice was full of a stern warning as Thomas Courtright spoke again:

"Go a little slow, brother! I can make allowance for your feelings, and stand a good deal from you because of that and because of the mother who bore us both; but you mustn't try to rub it in too deep!"

The other stooped and jerked the bowie-knife from the block of wood, then drew a heavy revolver from the belt about his waist before he spoke again:

"That you are a liar, your own confession has proved. If not a coward in addition, draw your weapons and show fight! There is not room in this gulch for both. Let the man who proves himself the best, go and meet Edna."

Thomas Courtright shrunk back from his half-mad brother, partly turning as though to retreat to the cabin, when a sharp exclamation parted his lips. A ragged, dusty, unshorn tramp was standing near, staring at the brothers with rum-bleared eyes.

"Who are you? What do you want?" harshly demanded Will Courtright as he observed him.

"Money or whisky—with the lick for ch'ice, gents," whiningly replied the unsavory-looking creature. "I'm dead broke, bottle empty, an' the snakes beginnin' to b'ile over the top o' my boots! It's monstrous hard fer a man what's see'd better days fer to come so low down as to beg off'm strangers, but 'member what the good books says: 'Them as shells out free to the onfortunit, 'll git resarved seats up the golden step-ladder'—or words to them effect's!"

Without waiting to hear the end of this whining speech, the miner strode rapidly to the cabin, returning with a bottle of liquor, speaking sharply:

"Take that and mosey! And mind: if I catch you spying around here again, I'll make a map of the United States on your back in red ink! Pull out, will you?"

With a trembling hand the bumme grasped the bottle and shuffled heavily away, casting nervous glances back over his shoulders, but not daring to stop long enough to sample the prize he had so unexpectedly won until the rocks and bushes formed a perfect screen behind him. Then, as though the long draught of brandy had given him courage, he parted the vines and gazed curiously down into the gulch.

He saw the brothers standing face to face.

He saw the elder of them gesticulating violently, still clasp the deadly weapons he had impulsively drawn. A malicious grin stole over his bloated countenance, and he muttered: "Brothers or not, I'm open to bet my head ag'in' a pint that thar's bloody murder done down thar afore dark!"

Mid-afternoon of that same day. The brothers have left the little gulch and are now beside the stage trail which leads from Denver. One is sullen, dark-faced, haggard-eyed; the last few hours have aged him in seeming more than thrice as many years of ordinary life could have done. The other is eager, nervous, his whole frame trembling with a poorly concealed impatience; and little wonder! He is waiting and watching for the wife whom he has not seen for nearly two years—for the one so dear to his heart that he risked incurring the deadly hatred of a dearly loved brother, rather than give her up.

"I see it! The stage's coming, Will," he muttered, his voice unsteady, his blue eyes suddenly growing dim with tears of great joy. "Almost here. Ten minutes, Will, and then—"

He suddenly cut himself short, flushing hotly as he felt how little his brother could be expected to share in his joy. He turned, to see his brother slowly walking away toward the vine-wreathed rocks with which the trail was lined. His lips parted as though to call him back, but instead he murmured:

"Poor fellow! Let him go. Perhaps it is best. In solitude he will see that we could not help it, and will come around all right. Then—with Edna for a sister—"

A ringing shout cut his soliloquy short as the dusty stage rolled into view. And then, almost before the vehicle drew up, the door opened and a light figure leaped out, to be clasped to the breast of the stalwart miner, whose bearded lips were kissing and receiving kisses, none the less sweet because there were half a dozen pair of curious eyes watching them from the stage.

All but one pair. They were fixed upon the half-hidden rocks where crouched the figure of a man whose right hand gripped a revolver, the muzzle bearing full upon the brain of the joyous husband!

The lips of the passenger parted, but it was to smile in dark and grim pleasure, not to utter a warning shout. And beneath his breath he muttered:

"Go it, Cain, while you're able!"

"Little mo' cider fo' Aunt Di— Durn cider! whisky's the jewel! Little mo' whisky fo' Uncle Fuller, little mo' whisky too—three, four—a hull bar'l chuck-full, by ding!"

Sprawling beside a little mountain spring, the ragged tramp was hugging his empty bottle and trying to sing, in a voice that would have shared a tame crow in its most garrulous moments.

It was night, the stars shining brightly, while on the tips of the highest peaks the light of the ascending moon could just be detected.

Trembling on the very verge of delirium tremens, the tramp had swallowed the entire contents of the bottle, strong brandy though it was, without being made fairly drunk. Instead, it seemed to brace his nerves, like food and drink to a starving man, while it whetted his appetite for more of the poison.

"F I was a rich man an' hed the makin' o' the laws, I'd see't every bottle held a plum bar'l! I'd make it a bangin' fense fer a man to go to bed sober! I'd offer a big'ward fer the dis-kivery o' how to grow good budge on trees. An' when it got fairly sot a-goin', I'd 'sign an' get the office o' taster-in-gin'ral, to tell folks when thar craps were ripe enough to harvest—durned ef I wouldn't!"

Uncorking the bottle, Uncle Fuller held it to his nostrils, sniffing at it with long sighs of mingled pleasure and regret.

"Durn shame he didn't give me two bottles 'stead o' jes' a measly one!" with a sudden outburst of righteous indignation. "An' durn'der fool me that I went off so cheap! It's wuth two bottles any day fer to git shet o' your Uncle Fuller!" hurling the bottle spitefully away from him. "He owes me 'nother bottle, an' durned ef I ain't goin' fer to claim my rights! Ef the critter don't pony up, I'll root 'round in his dooryard tell the cows come home—I jes' will!"

With drunken gravity he nodded, clapping one hand into the other, shaking them with an owl's solemnity, then struggling to his feet and moving toward the gulch where stood the lone cabin.

"One good turn 'sarves another, an' ef the critter don't give it, thar's goin' fer to be the high-tonedest row in these yer' diggin's the univarse ever hearn tell on! Death afo' dishonor! An' ef the critter won't give me the satisfaction jue a gentleman, hope may die 'f I don't butt his 'tarnal shack over—an' it's your Uncle Fuller you hear preachin', honey!"

Thus muttering, the drunkard stumbled along through the rocks and bushes, only pausing when he gained the ridge from whence he could gaze down into the lone cabin gulch.

He saw a light twinkling through the vine-

wreathed window, late though it was, and his bleared eyes suddenly opened wide as he caught the sound of voices, sharp and angry.

"Spit-spattin' till yit? Durned ef I don't sail down an' lick all-two-both on 'em! I'll jes' show—"

A sharp crack, as of a revolver. Shriill screams in a feminine tone. Fierce cries and curses. Another shriek, this time dying away in a choking wail as a revolver spoke again and yet again. And then silence over the lone cabin.

The Dutch courage of the bumme vanished, and trembling like a leaf in a storm, he turned and rushed away from the spot with his heels winged by fear.

High noon. A heap of smoking ruins lying where, only one short day before, stood the vine-wreathed cabin. Around the cabin stand a number of rough-clad men, working like demons in tearing aside the half-consumed logs. And then, bare-headed, silent, their skins showing unusually pale through the coating of smoke and ashes, they stand in a little cluster, surrounding the ghastly relics which their desperate efforts have unearthed and brought to light.

A little later, the crowd has scattered, leaving one man bending over the charred remains. They draw longer breaths as he rises, and standing before one man who stands a little apart with a vague air of justice about him, speaks slowly:

"Your honor, I have to report that after a careful and thorough examination, I find the remains those of a man and a woman. I must add further that they either committed suicide or were murdered, since there are bullet wounds penetrating each skull."

A low but fierce mutter ran through the crowd. The judge lifted his hand, and all was still again; but if tongues were absolutely beneath his control, not so the flashing eyes, the savagely clinched teeth and strong hands. Woe be unto the man who should be brought before that crowd of miners, charged with this doubly atrocious crime!

Later still, there is a rude semblance of the court of justice in session. The doctor gives in his evidence. And then, ragged, dirty, unsavory as ever, but sober and steady, the tramp who had carried to Denver the startling news, stood before the judge and told all that he had seen and heard.

"I never looked back on tel I was clean over the ridge an' hafe-way to town," he declared; "but then I see'd the red light an' jedged the critter was tryin' to hide his crime by settin' the shack afire."

His evidence was more than sufficient, and as he turned away and the judge glanced toward the men who had been sworn in as a jury, their foreman arose and spoke:

"Our verdict is that thar's bin bloody murder done, your honor, an' then arson piled on top o' that!"

"And have you fixed on any particular person as the criminal?"

In one voice, from the crowd as well as the jury, came:

"WILLIAM COURTRIGHT!"

And before the sun went down, the dark-faced brother was declared an outlawed murderer, with a price resting on his head!

Midnight! The full moon has risen high enough to look down into the gulch and show a human being kneeling beside the grave where rest Thomas Courtright and his wife, Edna. With hands uplifted, with pale face raised to heaven, with lips as silent as the grave, that man uttered a vow more eloquent than if it had found utterance in the fiercest tones.

CHAPTER I.

THE ARGONAUT AND THE BARNACLE.

INDEPENDENCE DAY in Independence City! Never again to be termed "camp" or "town," save at the peril of the bold scoffer across whose daring lips those henceforth-to-be despised terms should pass! And now that the long-coveted goal was gained at last, little wonder that the newly-made citizens were enthusiastic, or that they had resolved to make this return of "the day we celebrate" memorable in the annals of that wild mountain region.

The original proposal that all saloons keep "open house" and free liquor, was after a somewhat heated debate, together with the addition that "all hands and the cook" get "drunker'n b'iled owls," voted down. Instead, it was determined to celebrate after the good old fashion of the "country deestricks," with speech-making, singing, dancing, fireworks and a monster barbecue. And now that the all-important day had rolled around, Independence City was in its glory, decked in its holiday dress, brim-full of life and activity.

Not a building in the entire "city" but what sported at least one flag, while some were almost hidden beneath their burden of stars and stripes. Men, women and children were decked out in their finest, not forgetting a supply of tri-colored bunting, and one enthusiastic fellow, the fortunate possessor of a sway-backed white mule,

had borrowed or stolen paint sufficient to paint that meek-eyed animal after a most patriotic if not elegant fashion, with an American flag on each side, and smaller ones wherever the bony angles would permit. And around its scrawny tail, its neck, through each bullet-pierced ear, dangled streamers of red, white and blue. Not of ribbon. That was beyond the means of its patriotic owner, and he scorned to steal what his fertile mind could originate just as well.

"Mebbe 'tain't quite so scrumptious as some others is rigged out," he said, his shaggy head on one side as he complacently squinted at the woebegone mule; "but it's all thar, you bet! Flannel shirt an' overhauls, with a nose wipe I skun Tenpin Charley out of on'y las' night! Ain't it gay? Go 'way, boy! You want to fill a 'tesian well with mercury to tell how cold it is when 'Ristabulus Boythorn gits left!"

"Mighty right! An' cain't he jes' sling out the music, though?" chuckled his companion, grinning until it seemed as though his head would split asunder horizontally.

"Wait until the pore critter gits his steam up, then you kin talk. I gi'n him four-fingers this mornin' on his sawdust, but I don't reckon it's got jestly 'tributed through his systum yet; 'pears to me thar was a false note in the last solo—somethin' like a B flat whar it wanted to smack jest a leetle of a C sharp—don't you reckon?"

"Out o' practice, mebbe. They ain't nothin' like keepin' up the lick when ye once gits started," grinned the greasy, ragged, bloated fellow who had given his name as Uncle Fuller.

"Let the percession move along, then. They ain't nothin' of the hog 'bout me 'cept appertite an' I ain't a bit proud, even ef I hev got the only preambuletin' music-box they is in Independence City—with a he-ole S fer city!"

The grinning bummer tugged at the rope halter; with a groan the asthmatic mule moved forward; Aristabulus Boythorn dropped to the rear and with an awl-armed gad deftly touched his "music-box" near the root of its tail, with startling effects.

One vicious lashing out of its heels, then the hybrid planted its feet firmly, elevated its tail, thrust out its bony neck, and began to bray loud enough to waken the Seven Sleepers!

A yell of laughter from the bustling crowd greeted this exhibition. Aristabulus doffed his battered hat and graciously acknowledged the compliment for both himself and mule.

"That's better, Uncle! I knowed the bug-juice'd git in its work ef we on'y giv' it time. Go on with the percession! It's the Fo'th o' July, Independence is a city with a big S, an' we're boun' to do our part long's the music-box don't git out o' wind an' harmony! Gee-up, Yankee Doodle!"

Thus through the crowd, pausing as often as Aristabulus Boythorn saw fit to apply his armed gad, passing around the huge pavilion on which the principal part of the day's programme was to be carried out.

The citizens had spared neither trouble nor expense in fitting up this structure, and it really did them credit, being ample in size and attractively arranged, though a critic might have thought there was a trifle too profuse a display of the national colors. But since this was a double celebration—being quite as much in honor of Independence City as Independence Day—that was a fault easily overlooked.

The slender, straight trunks of pine saplings formed the upright timbers, planted firmly in the ground, braced carefully apart twenty feet above, then the tapering tops drawn together to form a roof, each Gothic arch being connected with the others by riders which were hidden from view by masses of green foliage. The sides of the structure were covered in the same attractive fashion, leaving one end entirely open, the other being differently arranged. White canvas was fastened from roof to foundation, forming a background for flags, mottoes and sentiments, the latter formed of evergreens, spangled with bright-hued mountain flowers.

Against this backing was erected a high throne, draped with white crape, laces, silken flags and other finery to which every woman in town had only been too proud and happy to contribute. A brightly cushioned chair rested on the apex, with other seats ranged below it in graduated semicircles; thirteen seats besides the throne proper.

Despite his proud ownership of the only "music-box" in the city, Aristabulus Boythorn could not help casting an admiring glance toward this structure as they passed the open end. Yet there was a trace of melancholy in his face and tones as he addressed his companion:

"It's a mighty big thing, Uncle; a mighty big thing, an' I'm monstrous glad I'm here to take it all in; though ef right was right, an' I hed all I should hev by rights, it's the big toad in the puddle I'd be. 'stead o' runnin' this brass band on fo' legs! Five year ago, whar was Independence City? In the ole man's pocket! Five year ago to-day, and me the only human critter 'ithin reachin' distance o' all this riches! An' now—a pore, ole, rum-soaked Barnacle! Sich is life in the Far West!"

"A ole residerter, I reckon?" ventured Uncle Fuller.

"Right you be, pard," with a sudden return of his wonted cheerfulness. "Old as they make 'em in these parts. Bless your ole socks, mate, I was one o' the 'riginal prospectors in the Blackhawk region—one o' the fu'st to climb up the Pike an' try to swaller the Peak! Whar Denver is, they was only sand an' dornicks. Whar—But you ain't a tenderfoot, your own self, an' I reckon mebbe you was in the rush o' '58?"

"Way back o' that, pard," was the proud reply, as the broken down bummer drew himself erect with a slight return of the fire of youth; "49 was my year, an' ef you see Denver boarded, I helped to hold the bottle fer Frisco afore she was weaned—ef you was a 'riginal Barnacle, so was I one o' the fu'st Argonauts!"

"Which I knowed it from the fu'st glimp—I could smell it in your atmosphere! Putt it thar, mate—good boy!"

The two veterans shook hands warmly, and then, at the invitation of Barnacle, the Argonaut accompanied him to one of the many booths which the enterprising saloon-keepers had erected on the celebration grounds.

"Le's take a set-down fer a bit, an' give Yankee Doodle time to git in a fresh supply o' wind," suggested Uncle Fuller, wiping his bearded lips with a ragged sleeve as they turned away from the bar. "Reckon you know 'most everybody in town?"

"City, ole man—city with a big S ef you don't want to lose that skelp o' yours!" frowned the Barnacle, sternly. "You kin borry my 'backy an' bite off a chaw to give me while you freeze to the plug yourself—you kin take my flask an' on'y give back the cork fer me to smell of—but you cain't call my Independence anythin' but a city with a big S, an' git off 'thout a lickin' after the fu'st warnin'!"

Uncle Fuller meekly begged pardon, and arm in arm the two wrecks of the Golden Fever passed out of the crowd and sat down side by side beneath the shade of a scrubby tree.

"Your Independence, I b'lieve you said?" hinted Uncle Fuller, as he produced a dirty sack of tobacco out of which the two worthies filled their pipes.

"Which I still holds to, ef thar's any vartue in diskivery," gravely replied the Barnacle. "Five year ago to-day I struck the fu'st pick an' washed the fu'st pan o' dirt here. An' four year ago to-day, I was wuth my little five oughts with a countin' figger tacked onto the left side o' the goose-aigs!"

Uncle Fuller slowly surveyed his companion from top to toe, then back again before speaking.

"Yit one wouldn't think you was a million-hair, to look at your outfit, jest now! Proud, mebbe, o' the times when you hed to rastle lively fer your chuck, an' bein's this is a sort o' annyvarsary, like, you hunted up your ole duds an'—"

"They wasn't hard to find, mate," with a ghastly grin the Barnacle interposed. "Bed-kiver by night an' wardrobe by day! No, I ain't proud. The day fer that's long past an' gone. Ef I hed it to live over—it'd be the same ole thing, no doubt! I never yit hed a pocket that didn't hev the biggest hole at the bottom! Waal, sich is life in the Far West!"

"Speckilated, mebbe? Went on Wall street, I reckon?"

"It went, an' that's enough," rather shortly uttered the old prospector. "The cash went, but the mem'ry o' them days didn't all go with it, an' when I turn toes up, I'll hev as fine a monnyment as ary king that ever trod the foot-stool!"

There was no mistaking his meaning when one saw the proud, yet sorrowful, glance which the Barnacle cast around him over the bustling crowd, then down at the "city" which, after a fashion, he had founded.

And then, after his rambling, discursive fashion, he unfolded to his companion the past history of Independence City.

It was a story which has had its counterpart time and again in the strange history of the gold and silver States, and would not be particularly referred to in this connection, but for the bearing which it had on some of the characters in the story which I have set out to narrate.

One of the original "Barnacles"—as all who "struck" Colorado in '58 are termed—Aristabulus Boythorn never "struck it rich" until he stumbled on the spot now before the reader. An old hand, he was not long in realizing the value of his discovery, and kept his secret to himself until he had filed his claims, complied with all the laws of the then Territory, and panned out enough gold to give him a fair start in developing his choice lead of quartz.

Of course the tidings of the "new discovery" spread like wildfire, and equally of course the rush at once began. As the discoverer, Boythorn demanded the right to name the camp which sprung up in a night, and thus Independence was born.

"It was on the Fo'th o' July that I fu'st struck color, an' bein' a free-born 'Merican citizen, I give it the name I thought was right. My

claim I called the 'Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death!' They've cut an' slashed at it ontel it hain't got nothin' left but the 'Liberty' part now!"

Fond of liquor and cards, Boythorn soon found himself in difficulties. He then sold his mine outright to a couple of speculators, who at once set about developing it in good earnest, and with such success that, at that day, the Liberty mine was one of the best producing in the State.

On the contrary, Aristabulus went down-hill rapidly, until now he was little better than a wreck. Where he had been among the highest, he was now the lowest. A fall into an old shaft while drunk, one night, destroyed his left eye, and on his recovery he was dubbed Bully Boy, partly from his proper name, and partly because one of those who purchased his claim had presented him with an artificial eye shortly after his accident. Aristabulus was very proud of this ornament, though his pleasure was so often marred by an irreverent addition to his slangy nickname: "Bully Boy with the Glass Eye!"

Uncle Fuller was seemingly an interested listener to the story of his companion, but a close observer would have seen that his bleared eyes were roving restlessly through the crowd as though searching for some particular person. And the same observer might have noticed that it was not among the commoner grade of men that his gaze lingered longest, but when one well dressed came across his vision, the eager gaze never wavered until a fair view was obtained of the face attached.

"You've sot up in business as a city, then?" he asked, as the Barnacle paused in his recital for lack of breath.

"Sart'in! 'Lected a mare an' common scoundrels an' two p'lice jedges an' some commoner truck. Oh, we went the hull hog this time, you bet! Independence City hain't no slouch when it comes to slingin' on style, I tell ye!"

"Waal, I don't want to say one word ag'in' the city, nur yit throw a slur into the faces o' the citizens, but ef they didn't do themselves proud by 'lectin' you to the fu'st seat o' honor, then they've played it mighty low down! An' you the founder o' the tow—city with a capital S!"

Aristabulus cast a shy glance into the face of his companion, as though expecting to see there a sneer, but apparently Uncle Fuller meant every word he uttered, and then the old miner replied:

"I ain't fitted fer to be mare, an' I wouldn't 'a' tuck the nomernation ef they'd made the offer—which they didn't."

"The more shame them, then!" earnestly cried Uncle Fuller, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, only to stare at a neatly-dressed man who just then came into view. "Who's that yender?" he muttered, his voice husky and strained.

"Him we was talkin' 'bout—the mare—Frederick Lyon, Esquire," calmly replied the Barnacle, but curiously eying his companion, wondering at his excitement.

Uncle Fuller saw this, and with an effort, brought his feelings under control, though there was a red light in his bleared eyes that glowed and glittered as he watched the man for whose coming he had watched so long and impatiently.

"Thought I knowed him, but mebbe I was mistook. Bin long in these parts, do you reckon?"

"Little better'n f'o' year. He's one o' the men what bought me out," was the dry reply.

"Frederick Lyon?" mused Uncle Fuller, thoughtfully rubbing his stubby beard, still keenly watching his man as though he expected to see him vanish into thin air. "It don't seem like the name, but it's the same ole face—only a leetle older an' fine-like. 'Deed I could most sw'ar it was my ole pard what I knowed down kentry."

"Why don't ye go ax him?" sarcastically asked Boythorn. "Ef he is your old pard, like enough he'll be monstrous glad fer to see ye—mebbe 'll take you hum to dinner!"

"Durned ef I don't chauce it, anyhow!" exclaimed Uncle Fuller, rising and striding forward, while Aristabulus watched him with curiously mingled emotions.

Knowing how proud, how exclusive Frederick Lyon was with all save those who could justly class themselves as his equals in worldly eyes, he expected to see the ragged, filthy bummer withered by a single glance of proud contempt.

Uncle Fuller, however, appeared to entertain no such fear, for striding rapidly forward, he hung around until Frederick Lyon parted with the man to whom he was talking, then thrusting himself directly in his path, grinning broadly as the wealthy mine-owner abruptly halted to avoid coming in contact with the mass of rags and dirt.

Thrusting out one hand, clapping Lyon on the shoulder with the other, Uncle Fuller cried, in tones that even the distant Aristabulus caught:

"Hellow! Bill Courtright, you ole sinner, how goes it?"

CHAPTER II.

"SHALL AULD ACQUAINTANCE BE FORGOTT?"

"Be durned ef he didn't do it, too!" muttered the worthy Barnacle, leaning forward with staring eyes, surprise making the sound member look fully as glassy as the one with an artificial case. "An' he's hit the mare 'twixt wind an' water, too, or I'm a tenderfoot from Greenland!"

There was more truth than poetry in this emphatic expression. From a haughty, disdainful stare at the disreputable shape that dared to block his path, the mine-owner actually seemed to cower and shrink from Uncle Fuller, casting a swift glance around him; but whether meditating flight or to learn whether or no that strange name had been caught by curious ears, could only be surmised. Certain it is that Frederick Lyon turned pale as a ghost, let that emotion rise from anger or fear, as the case might be.

Uncle Fuller grinned more broadly than ever, and there was something in his bloated countenance that told even plainer than words what a hard taskmaster he would prove himself should fate ever place another wholly in his power.

"Lawd love ye, Bill, ye lookin'-glass o' shovelry! it does the ole man more good to see ye than a dose o' salts! Shake, fer ole times, pard, when you was rastlin' fer chuck in the Blackhawk region down Denver-way! Putt it thar—eh?"

Uncle Fuller made a grasp at the gloved hand of the mine-owner, only to have the light cane cross his dirty knuckles with a tingling emphasis, while Frederick Lyon drew his form still more proudly erect as he said, coldly:

"You must be mistaken in the man, my good fellow. I know neither you nor the friend of whom you speak."

Clear and cold came the words, without the faintest trace of agitation, while the speaker stood gazing steadily into the face of the bummer, a slight smile of amused contempt beginning to curl his mustached lip.

A decidedly handsome, fine-looking man was this newly elected head of Independence City. Just in the prime of life, if outward appearances were to be believed; tall, and athletic in build, quick and graceful in his motions, dressed with a neatness, taste and care very seldom to be seen in a mining-camp, Frederick Lyon presented a strong contrast to the disreputable figure with which he was now confronted.

His complexion was dark but clear. His eyes black as jet, full of fire and strong passions. His nose was slightly hooked. The lower part of his face was masked by a full beard, which was kept neatly trimmed, amidst the blackness of which could be traced here and there a silver thread.

Mechanically Uncle Fuller lifted his smarting knuckles to his mouth, staring with a bewildered air into the face of the man whom he had marked for his victim, his whisky-soaked wits thrown into complete confusion by this sudden and complete change. And his confusion increased as Frederick Lyon gave vent to a short, pleasant laugh as of mirth at his ludicrous embarrassment, saying:

"It's rather early in the day, my good fellow, to be drunk, but perhaps the occasion is sufficient to excuse the excess. Yet I can hardly believe you a citizen?"

There was a slight rising inflection marking this last sentence, and Uncle Fuller took it for a question.

"No," he muttered, his tones sounding mechanically, his eyes stupidly staring into that calm, smiling face. "I jes' drapped down yer yest'day; which I didn't know but what I mought run across a ole-time pard or two, an—"

"And honored me by taking me for one of those friends?" laughed the mine-owner, pleasantly enough, but with a trace of contempt in his tones that sent a still deeper flush to the sunburnt countenance of the broken-down Argonaut.

There was a venomous glitter in his eyes as they flashed a look upward, but his voice was meekness itself as he said:

"Reckon I was a durn fool, boss."

"Oh, not quite so bad as that," was the light reply. "The best of us are liable to make errors, and on an occasion like this, it is even more natural. By the way, what name was it you mentioned, a bit ago?"

"Bill Courtright, from down Denver-way," slowly replied Uncle Fuller, keenly though covertly watching the face of his questioner as he uttered the words.

But if he expected to see a repetition of the earlier scene, he was doomed to suffer disappointment. Those black eyes were watching him calmly, one gloved hand slowly smoothing the neatly-trimmed beard, and the tones were clear and distinct with which the mine-owner added:

"I never heard the name before, and if Mr. Courtright is in town, he must be a very recent arrival. Of course you realize your mistake now?"

"Reckon I do," slowly uttered Uncle Fuller, his eyes drooping before that steady gaze.

"At fu'st off I could 'a' tuck my solemn 'davy you was my ole pard Bill, but now—you don't kerry a wart on the eend o' your nose, big as a door-knocker, do ye?" he suddenly cried, peering owlishly into the face of the mine-owner as though in quest of that ornament.

"Well, I hope not," laughed Lyon.

"Durned ef ye do, nuther! That settles it, boss! You ain't the critter I tuck ye fer, an' I humbly ax pardin. I'd go fuder, ef I could, but divil a rap hev I got in my clo'es, an' your p'izen-slingers is too high-toned to hang it up fer a strange gent, I diskiver."

The gloved hand slipped into a pocket, returning with a gleam of silver in its palm.

"Oblige me," and the coin changed ownership deftly. "This celebration is partly in my honor, and no man must go hungry or dry while I can prevent it. Good-day."

"Long life to ye, boss, an' many more of 'em!" cried the bummer, bowing and scraping, then drawing up and staring after the mayor with a curious gleam in his bleared eyes. "It's who so high an' mighty as *you*, jest now; but wait—wait a bit, my covay! Ef they ain't a bit in your mouth an' a ring in your nose afore your head gits any grayer, then I ain't your Uncle Fuller—that's all!"

As the shape of the mayor vanished amid the bustling crowd, Uncle Fuller turned toward the spot where he had left the aged Barnacle, on whose hairy countenance was visible a broad grin of satisfaction. A little startled at first by the strange success with which the impudent advance of the bummer was attended, when that lithe cane doubled itself across the grimy knuckles, Aristabulus nodded his approval, settling down to fully enjoy the scene which he felt sure was to follow.

"Stumbled onto a blind lead, didn't ye?" he chuckled, as the ragged bummer drew near. "Got the dirty shake from your ole pard, I shouldn't wonder?"

"Yas—in your mind!" drawled Uncle Fuller. "Pesky queerious way o' shakin' paws, anyhow."

"They was a 'skeeter on my knuckles, an' course he killed it," unblushingly uttered the bummer, tossing the bright coin into the air, catching it as it fell, then spitting upon it before slipping it into his pocket, "for luck."

"Wonder he didn't fall onto your neck an' buzz ye fer ole times!" sniffed the disgusted Barnacle.

"Fore comp'ny, or mebbe he would. That was the why he acted so stiff; didn't want to make any o' the cits jealous. He sais, sais he: 'Keep a stiff lip jest now, ole pard, but come 'round to the kitchen do' afo' you retaliate to-night, an' we'll talk over ole times across a mug o' somethin' good an' strong; now don't go back onto the ole man, honey!'"

"He tole you that? Mare Lyon?"

"Ef he didn't, I'm a liar right from Munchausenville!"

"I b'lieve it!" hastily put in the Barnacle.

Uncle Fuller gazed at him out of the corner of one eye, as though a little dubious, but then he thought it best to let the subject drop for the present, sending his gaze in quest of Frederick Lyon. He was almost immediately successful, for the tall figure of the mayor was visible through the skurrying crowd, and a few moments later stood in a cleared space not many yards distant from the spot where the two ancients sat, talking earnestly to his present companion.

Uncle Fuller gave a husky gasp, catching the Barnacle by the arm with a force that made Aristabulus wince.

"Consarn it, man—"

"Who's *he*—who's the critter talkin' with the mare?" huskily muttered Uncle Fuller, staring with protruding eyes at the twain before them.

"They is two on 'em, ain't they? It ain't the snakes got me ag'in, is it? Durn it, be *quick*!"

"They's two, that's sart'in," deliberately replied the Barnacle, wresting his arm free from that desperate grasp. "The mare an' his pardner, Jeter Burgess, Exquire—the two gents as bought out the 'Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death!'"

The ragged bummer sat like one transfixed, staring at the two gentlemen who looked as much alike as two peas taken from the same pod! The same in hight and build; in complexion, in eyes, nose and fashion of wearing the beard! If any difference existed, it was that the new-comer had a little more silver mixed with his beard; but only for the slight difference in the garments they wore, even Uncle Fuller could not have told them apart.

"Which is which, an' which is t'other?" muttered the ragged bummer, brushing a grimy hand across his forehead as though in hopes of thus clearing away the mists. "One on 'em is my meat, but *which*?"

"Your mate?" laughed the Barnacle, sarcastically. "Why, the one as axed you to call at the kitchen do', in course!"

This speech recalled Uncle Fuller to his senses, and he hastily arose, asking his new-found friend to assist him in driving another "coffin-nail."

This was scarcely accomplished, when a wild hurrah arose from the crowd; revolvers, rifles

and giant crackers began to split the air, and Aristabulus hurriedly muttered:

"The percession is comin'! Ketch up the music-box as quick as ye kin, pard! We've got to do our juety this day!"

Casting aside all perplexing thoughts for the time being Uncle Fuller obeyed, and in another minute Yankee Doodle was sending forth a tremendous salutation to the approaching procession of youth and beauty.

The business of the day was about to commence.

In the lead came eight stout men, each supporting on broad shoulders one end of strong poles. Across these supports was placed a platform, covered over with evergreens, flowers and flags. Upon the platform a neatly draped chair, in which sat a vision of youthful grace and beauty. Her garb was that which tradition has given to the American Goddess of Liberty, even to the cap with which her proud head is surmounted. Only in this case the front bore the legend "INDEPENDENCE."

Following this, came thirteen other elevated chairs, all decorated after the same fashion, though with less elaboration and smaller in size, four bearers being sufficient to carry each platform with its—more or less—fair burden.

Candor compels the admission that all were not on an equality with the beauteous Goddess who led the van, in either youth or natural charms. Some were decidedly homely, while more than one of the ladies had passed the boundaries of youth. But young and lovely women were not over plentiful in Independence City, and when one does their level best, criticism is odious.

Slowly the procession moved along to the pavilion, where the Goddess of Liberty alighted and gracefully took up her station on the throne. One by one, the names of the thirteen original States were called by Frederick Lyon, the other platforms were vacated and the semicircles below the Goddess were filled.

Thus far everything had passed off exactly as laid down in the programme, and but for the over zeal of some of the enthusiastic citizens, doubtless thus would it have been to the end of the day. But those few were not satisfied with the share they had thus far played in the *fete*, and now touched off a mine of giant crackers which they had prepared in anticipation of this moment.

There were a few little screams from the animated States as the loud reports burst forth, seemingly directly beneath the seats, but a wild cheer drowned their exclamations. Cheers were given for the Goddess, for each one of the States, and where the wild hurrahs would have ceased, no one could tell, had not a scream of terror broke from one of the women.

A brisk breeze was blowing, and a portion of an exploded cracker had set fire to the flimsy drapery, the flames suddenly shooting up about the terrified women!

Instantly all was confusion and consternation. The women, screaming hysterically, deserted their endangered thrones, falling and tripping over each other in their mad haste to escape the flames, while the men, as yet unable to fully comprehend the meaning of the panic, stared in amazement.

"Keep cool, and all will be well!" cried the Goddess, in a clear, musical voice, setting an example herself; but only for an instant; then a wild scream burst from her lips as she saw the garments of one of her maids blaze up, and darting to the rescue, she fought the flames with her bare hands!

And then the entire background burst into a blaze.

CHAPTER III.

THE BARNACLE'S LAMENT.

It was an act of heroism such as few women in the midst of a panic would have proven equal to, but the sight of her bosom friend in such deadly peril conquered all weaker emotions in the generous bosom of the Goddess of Liberty. Favored by the brisk breeze, her own escape without injury was assured, but turning, she sprang to the side of the fallen girl, beating at the rising flames with her bare hands, crying aloud for aid. And then a fiery tongue lapped itself around her own form, igniting the fleecy material of which her robes were made. One instant, and then she seemed but a mass of flames!

All this occurred with the rapidity of thought and, though for a few brief seconds the men below were at a loss to realize what had occurred, the instant this was made clear, their action was prompt and decisive enough.

Foremost among those who leaped to the rescue were two young men, the foremost tearing with one swift grasp half the blazing drapery from the screaming woman who represented Independence, then yielded her to his companion, himself stooping and raising the fallen girl to her feet. With a dexterous movement he whirled her limp form about in his arms, extinguishing the flames with his own person even as he leaped with her from the fiery throne to the crowded floor below.

This done, it was but the work of a moment to wrap about her the large flag which he took

with him in his leap, his manly face flushing with pleasure as he caught her murmured thanks.

"My child—give her to me!" cried a hoarse, husky voice at his elbow, and then an almost fierce grasp wrenched away the strong arm which supported his trembling burden.

The half-frown faded away as the young man recognized the one who handled him so rudely, and a smile came in its place as his instinctive resistance came to an end. A quick glance showed him that there was no further danger to be apprehended from the fire.

All of the imperiled women had escaped from the throne without any more serious injury than a few scratches and bruises received in their frantic stampede. The young man who was second to reach the side of the Goddess of Liberty had succeeded in completely extinguishing the flames which remained after that one dexterous snatch, though not wholly without injury himself, and was now in the act of resigning his fainting burden to the care of her father, Frederick Lyon.

A score of men were tearing down the remains of the throne, though the fire had about spent its fury in licking up the boarded finery which the good dames of Independence City had brought forth to do honor to the occasion.

"If you say so, certainly, Mr. Burgess," the young man quickly uttered, though there was something in the slow unclosing of his scorched arms that told his was no unpleasant duty, no disagreeable burden, just then. "But I am younger and stronger—wouldn't it be best for me to bear Miss Burgess to the outer air? The crowd is so dense and—"

"You can help me force a way, if you will be so kind," the mine-owner hurriedly responded, but drawing the light figure tightly to his own breast.

There was little work left for him to do but to follow in the wake of the young athlete, whose broad shoulders and muscular arms seemed to roll the excited crowd back and to either side as easily as the cutwater of a ship parts the still waters. And when the clear ground was gained, the mine-owner was hastening away, his daughter still in his arms, without a word of thanks or parting; but, terribly frightened as she had been, Mora Burgess was too much a lady to permit such a breach of common politeness in one so dear to her as her sole remaining parent.

"Papa—this gentleman—surely you will not go away without at least thanking him!" she whispered, hurriedly.

"Afterward—you first, Mora, darling! I must get you home as soon as may be. I dare not stop here to inspect your injuries, and the loss of a minute may mean all the difference between life and death to you, my only, my precious one!" the strongly agitated mine-owner replied.

To his intense amazement, Mora freed herself from his trembling grasp, and holding the scorched flag around her with one little hand, extended the other to the young athlete who had literally passed through fire for her sake.

"I could not go away without thanking you, sir," she said in tones that trembled, more from excitement than any injury she had received. "You saved my life!"

The young man removed his hat, bowing over the little hand with a degree of respect that seemed little short of devotion, but when he drew himself erect there was a bright, laughing smile in his big blue eyes.

"Hardly that, Miss Burgess, when there were so many good men and true within sight. Fortune favored me above them, by giving me a place in the front rank, and when the citizens rushed so impetuously to the rescue of their fairest, dearest treasures, I was carried along in advance of the rolling tide. And yet, lady, your kind thanks make me very proud!"

As she felt those mustached lips brush her hand—as she encountered that bright gaze and heard that mellow voice—Mora Burgess felt a strange thrill rushing over her, and with a little shudder she withdrew her hand and hid her face on the broad bosom of her parent, who hastily uttered:

"Excuse us, Mr.—"

"Lightfoot—Frank Lightfoot, at your service, sir."

"I hope to see you again, Mr. Lightfoot, when I can better express our thanks for the great service you have this day rendered us; but now—I must look to this poor child!"

Without giving the young man time to make any reply, the mine-owner, half-carrying, half-leading his daughter, hastened away to his dwelling. Not until they were out of sight along the winding road which led to the flats below on which the mining-camp stood, did Frank Lightfoot remove his steady gaze. And when he did the bright smile was gone, a dark, moody frown having taken its place.

As he turned, he came face to face with Frederick Lyon, pale, agitated as none in Independence City had ever before known him, walking beside a litter on which reclined the motionless form of his child, the so recently radiant Goddess of Liberty. One of the bearers was the young man who had completed the

work so deftly begun by Frank Lightfoot. Heedless of his own burns, of the blood which the exertion drew from his scorched and cracked skin as his hands grasped the pole, of his singed head and still smoking garments, Lucien Varney gazed dimly down at the covered figure, for in that litter he felt that his future happiness or despair was lying.

"Not dead, surely?" softly whispered Frank Lightfoot of one of the awe-stricken crowd, removing his hat and remaining uncovered until the litter passed by.

"Not yet—I reckon she feels fainty-like," was the reply, given in the same subdued tones. "They don't know how bad she's hurt yet, but it must be awful, from *his* face!" with a covert nod toward the bowed form of the mine-owner.

"We'll hope for the best, until the worst stares us in the face," more cheerfully uttered Lightfoot. "It does not seem possible that she could be so seriously injured, the fire was so soon extinguished."

The old fellow shook his head dubiously. Like many another, while lamenting, he preferred to believe the worst.

Watching the slowly-moving litter, or rather watching the bowed figure of the mine-owner, was the ragged bum, Uncle Fuller; watching, just as he had watched the going of Jeter Burgess after his parting from Frank Lightfoot. And scratching his head after a puzzled fashion, he was muttering:

"Which is which? That's the pint. Let the old man once fairly tetch bottom, an' his fortin's jest everlastin'ly made. That's a bonanza *somewhar*, ef I kin on'y work the vein jest right! Which is which? One on 'em I kin swar is Bill Courtright, but they can't be two sich! Ef I on'y—*Ouch!*"

A heavy hand fell upon his shoulder, making him break off suddenly with a grunting snort and craven crouching of his bloated form that is so habitual to the criminal who has reason to think he "is wanted" by the minions of the law. But a great sigh of relief broke from his trembling lips as he cast a glance over his shoulder and recognized the Barnacle.

"Left ag'in, ole pard!" ejaculated the ancient, apparently failing to read that start aright. "Young blood's quicker on the trigger'n ole bones, an' it's the fust pole that gits the permissons, in these days. Sech a chaine, too, ef on'y we'd bin long-legged an' smart enough otherwise fer to've made the rifle! Lovely female gal in danger—bold hero comes snortin' 'long—rescues an' red fire—thanks an' courtin'—a passon an' a ring—wife an' kids—but sech is life in the Far West!"

With a dolorous sigh that was almost a groan the Barnacle cast himself down upon the ground in the shade, listlessly watching the men at work tearing away the ruins of the throne over which so much consultation and pleasant scheming had been wasted. Uncle Fuller dropped to a position beside him, but in such a manner that his face could be averted or hidden from view of his comrade without awakening suspicion.

"The one chaine in a lifetime, an' we let it slip through our fingers like the tail of a durned greased pig!" sniffed Aristabulus in tones of utter disgust. "Jest a mite sprier—though we mought look a leetle bit smugger, prehaps, come to take a ca'm an' onprejudiced look at our dry goods—an' we mought 'a' run our hulks into a snug haven fer the rest o' our nat'ral days on airth! But we *wasn't* an' we *didn't* an' we *won't*, while them two young sprigs *was* an' *did* an' *will*—you mark my preachin', honey!"

"Who was they?" listlessly asked Uncle Fuller, his mind following out the blind lead he had struck, and which he felt confident would eventually lead him to a long-wished-for bonanza.

"Luce Varney was one. He's sorter clark an' head man in the office o' Lyon & Burgess, down yender. Smart young feller, ef he hes sorter cut the ole man out—yas, he is!"

"An' the other cove? I didn't git a fa'r squint at his face, but he han'led hisself mighty piert."

"Which I can't say so much 'bout him, fer the reason I don't know the one hafe," was the candid reply. "He bain't bin long in the city—with a big S—ye see. Come here sorter prospectin', I reckon, though the good Lawd knows they ain't much room fer work o' that kin' in these diggin's no longer. Ef the payin' ground wasn't all tuck up, think you'd ketch the ole man loppin' 'round here 'thout a color in his wardrobe? Not much! An' yit, the lad don't look like a tenderfoot nur yit a greenhorn to waste his time 'this-a-way. He's built from bed-rock up, an' he'll never hev to buy a rubber ring fer to cut his wisdom teeth on, you hear me, honey!"

"Mebbe he's on the 'cross'," muttered Uncle Fuller.

"Mebbe you're Queen Victory in disguise!" sniffed the Barnacle, contemptuously. "That he's pure white an' the raal quill, a blind man could see without lookin' twicet. He's the werry pictur' of a man, clean down to the ground. Jest sech another as was one I needn't name no clearder, a few year gone by. 'Twasn't *then* that you'd see 'Ristabulus Boythorn takin' a

back seat when it come to rescooin' beauty—never once!"

The veteran gave a deep sigh, then shook himself together with an impatient grunt. It was not often he allowed himself to indulge in such unprofitable reflections. He knew that he had "served his time," and if he had wasted his golden opportunities only himself was to blame. The past was past.

"That's the young feller now!" he exclaimed, pointing out the tall, athletic form of Frank Lightfoot, as that worthy passed along toward the marred pavilion.

Uncle Fuller turned his bleared eyes listlessly in the direction indicated, and as chance would have it, just then Lightfoot partly turned his head, thus affording a fair three quarter view of his face.

A short snort of surprise escaped the bum, and he rubbed his eyes with his knuckles as though to clear his vision, then stared fixedly at the young man.

"Now, I *will* be durned!" he muttered, his voice husky with excitement. "Air all the faces I ever knowed turnin' up here like a foty-graph gallery was bu'sted wide open? Who next?"

"You know the critter, then? Mebbe it's another ole-time pard o' your'n?" sarcastically uttered the Barnacle, who was gradually coming to the conclusion that this new-found mate of his was a fraud of the very first water.

Uncle Fuller started and stared at his companion for a moment, plainly unconscious of having uttered his thoughts in audible accents. He saw the curling lip and detected the sneer of the worthy Barnacle, and that was sufficient to restore his native impudence.

"Know him?" he echoed, lifting his eyebrows to the brim of his battered hat, as though in surprise that such a query should be addressed to him. "Waal, I kinder guess *yes!* Knowed him afore he could walk. Give him a gold-lined mug when he was named. Teached the little critter how to walk an' say his A B C's. Tuck him 'cross my knee many a time fer playin' his tricky didoes onto your Uncle Fuller—deed, *yes!*"

Aristabulus deliberately rose to his feet, standing before the astonished Argonaut with doubled fists quivering in front of his face as he spoke with quiet resolution:

"Look here you! I tuck to you from the jump-off, not fer yer style nur yit your good looks, but beca'se you could stow away more an' stingier bug-juice then even I could, an' that without a wink or blink. I've treated you like a gintleman ever sence; but a gintleman don't belch out lies by the yard long, an' that's jest what I begin fer to believe you've bin doin' ever sence we struck each other's comp'ny."

"Who's hit *you* on the funny-bone?" growled the bum.

"You hev, ef I ain't mistook. Sit still. Try to git up an' I'll lend you one that'll put ye to sleep fer a week! Stop thar ontel I come back, ef you love your hide!"

With a parting flourish of his bony fist, Aristabulus turned on his heel and called aloud to Frank Lightfoot. The young man glanced around, and catching sight of the uplifted hand, he came rapidly forward, curiosity written upon his face.

Uncle Fuller started to scramble to his feet, but the ready hand of the Barnacle checked him when he would have shuffled away, wheeling him around until he stood face to face with the approaching man.

"Hope it ain't troublin' of ye too much, Mr. Lightfoot," said Aristabulus, with native politeness, as the young man looked curiously toward him; "but here's a critter that knowed ye when ye was a kid—spanked you many a time as a boy, 'cordin' to his say-so. That bein' the case, I knowed it must be a he-ole pleasure fer you two to meet ag'in an' talk over ole times. Mr. Frank Lightfoot, Uncle Fuller—Uncle Fuller, Mr. Frank Lightfoot!"

Having successfully accomplished this feat of politeness the Barnacle withdrew a pace, folding his arms and watching the flushed face of his drinking companion.

Uncle Fuller, loth to flee, afraid to boldly face the dilemma into which his habit of boasting had flung him, stole a covert glance at the young man who was steadily regarding him, but with little of pleasure or aught but scorn in his fine features.

"Brace up, pard," laughed Boythorn. "Member how you used fer to spank him fer playin' tricks onto his Uncle Fuller!"

"There must be some mistake," quietly uttered Lightfoot. "I am nearly positive we never met before this day. If I ever had that pleasure, this gentleman is at liberty to correct me. Mr. Fuller, please reply—did you and I ever meet before?"

Slowly, reluctantly the bum looked up, muttering:

"Never afore this day, as I knows on, sir."

CHAPTER IV.

UNCLE FULLER'S LITTLE BONANZA.

OVER the face of the Barnacle came an expression of supreme disgust as he listened to this admission.

"Why, you 'tarnal critter!" he spluttered, his face as red as that of an angry turkey-cock, his bony hands closing and unclosing after a most disagreeably suggestive manner; "'tain't but a minnit ago you swore you knowed the gent from A to Ampersand! That you nussed him when a kid, an' taught him all he knowed! An' now—I like a liar, but you suit me too mighty well, you do!"

Uncle Fuller glanced quickly from one face to the other, looking more like a hang-dog than ever; but for all that, his hands silently turned to fists, and there was something in his bearing that said he would, like a cornered rat, fight hard if crowded too close in a corner.

"I don't know him," he muttered, licking his puffy lips, his voice assuming that mechanical whine which seems a part and portion of our beggars and tramps when they wish to excite either charity or compassion. "I thought I did, but my ole eyes went back onto me. I'm gittin' old, gents, an' they do say 'at blindness sorter runs in the fambly. No, I think I did, but I fin' I didn't, gents."

"Thought you recognized an old friend in me? Well, that could hardly be," quietly uttered Frank Lightfoot, his keen blue eyes still fixed upon the flushed countenance of the ragged bummer. "I fail to recall either your name or your features, and I seldom forget a face once seen."

"Which it's a bloomin' pity that critter wouldn't foller the 'zample of!" sniffed the disgusted Barnacle. "The matter with him is that he reckenizes too durned many faces that he never see'd afore!"

"I thought I knowed him, but I didn't," mechanically repeated the bummer, glancing cautiously from side to side as though searching for some loophole of escape.

"It's a gift on which I rather pride myself," complacently added Lightfoot, seemingly unconscious of the unpleasant feelings his presence was exciting. "It has served me more than one good turn, to say nothing of the cause of justice, when I was in her employ. For instance; when I was a deputy sheriff, down country a bit, I arrested a man for committing a dastardly crime. The only clew I had to his identity was a momentary glimpse of his face by the blue flicker of a match, in the middle of a dark night. It was six months afterward before I struck the broken trail, but I ran him to earth and clapped the irons around his wrists, ready to swear that he was the criminal."

The worthy Barnacle glanced suspiciously from one to the other. He noted that steady gaze, he even fancied he could detect a hidden meaning in that cold, stern voice. He saw that the bloated face of Uncle Fuller turned from an unhealthy red to a dirty gray, still more disagreeable to contemplate, and his suspicions found a partial vent in words:

"Which o' course that thief wasn't *this* critter? He's got too many high 'lations an' rich 'quaintances fer *that*!" he uttered with sarcastic emphasis, bringing one hand down on the shoulder of his recent friend with a heavy slap that caused the bummer to wince.

"Durn it all!" whined the tramp, with a venomous glance upward from the corner of his bloodshot eye. "Didn't I say I never see'd the gent afore? Didn't he say the same thing?"

"Of course this gentleman could not be the vile scoundrel to whom I made reference," coolly added Frank Lightfoot, as Aristabulus turned doubtfully toward him once more. "I turned the criminal over to the proper authorities, but he contrived to make his escape before trial. I took an oath to bring him back, if he ever crossed my trail again, and though I have long since resigned my office as deputy, that vow still holds good. So you see, gentlemen, it is lucky that Mr. Fuller is not the thief."

Though Frank Lightfoot was but a recent arrival at Independence City, there was something in his manner and presence that inspired confidence in those with whom he came in contact, and the uncomfortable suspicions of the worthy Barnacle were dissipated quite as rapidly as they had found birth. Turning toward Uncle Fuller, he extended a hand, saying in a cordial tone:

"Putt it thar, mate, ef you don't hold a grudge when they ain't no 'fense 'tended on t'other side. Mebbe I was a little too quick on trigger, but I *does* hate a lie, wusser?"

"The best of us are liable to make mistakes," laughingly observed Lightfoot as the two grimy paws came together and closed in what was, on one side at least, a hearty grip. "Though not an old friend of Mr. Fuller, I am quite willing to be considered a new one, if he will do me that honor."

"Which o' course he will, an' mighty glad o' the chaine, too!" enthusiastically cried the Barnacle, jerking the hand of the bummer forward and clapping it into the outstretched member of the other, his own brawny paws encircling both, and materially contributing to the vigorous pump-handle motion. "Mr. Lightfoot, Uncle Fuller—Uncle Fuller, Mr. Frank Lightfoot!"

When this indispensable Americanism was fairly disposed of, and each man permitted to

recover his tingling hand, Frank Lightfoot blandly completed the formula with:

"Since it is Independence Day, gentlemen, suppose we celebrate a little? I suppose a man can find something at one or another of these booths, outside of which he can struggle without absolutely committing suicide?"

"'Tain't much to brag on, but ary one 'll do, I reckon," chuckled the Barnacle, with alacrity leading the way to one of the rude stands which lined the celebration-grounds.

Uncle Fuller was less alert, and actually seemed on the point of parting company with the others, when Lightfoot cast a winning glance into his face that served all the ends of a positive command. In silence he followed, but as his lowered eyes rested on the "pistol-pocket" of the Barnacle, they began to sparkle afresh. Just peeping forth from the tatters was the suggestive cork and neck of a pint bottle, and as Uncle Fuller quickened his step, he could catch a glimpse of the reddish liquor contained therein.

And while the Barnacle was busily chatting with Lightfoot over their liquor, one grimy paw stole toward that tempting object. Slowly, deftly the flask was withdrawn from its hiding-place, and then swiftly transferred to another on an entirely different person. Then, with an air of suddenly-awakened curiosity, Uncle Fuller moved away from the booth toward the blackened, besmirched pavilion.

A stealthy glance backward showed him the twain still engaged in conversation, and he slipped behind the nearest cover, walking rapidly away, only pausing when at a safe distance from observation.

This was near the foot of the steep ridge which bounded one side of the place selected by the patriotic citizens as a celebration-ground. Half-reclining beneath the shade and shelter of a clump of stunted saplings, Uncle Fuller gave vent to his pent-up feelings after no very agreeable manner.

Forbidding as an evil nature, unbridled passions and long dissipation had made features none too regular or handsome at the outset, the disreputable-looking tramp was now absolutely repulsive. His face was flushed and contorted with a sullen rage. His eyes glowed redly. His snaggy teeth were ground and grated together as an infuriated boar champs its tusches. His hands closed and thumped the ground before him, then opened to dig his stumpy fingers deep into the soil, tearing and rending at it as though it was the throat of a hated and feared enemy lying wholly at his mercy.

"Ef it on'y jest was him, an' I wasn't sech a bloody coward!" he grated with a hissing curse, that might well have blistered lips less familiar with blasphemy. "What ugly luck turns him up here, jest when I kin see the sun a-shinin' on ahead? What makes him put a finger in my pie? Look out, you bloodhoun'! I won't *always* run! An' ef I ever do turn—salt won't save ye, onless you kerry eyes in your back!"

A sudden motion brought his hand in contact with the bottle which he had so deftly stolen from Aristabulus Boythorn, and the savage scowl changed to a grin of low cunning and delight as he drew it forth from its hiding-place, pulled out the cork and applied the mouth to his nostrils.

"The dirty, onmannerly critter!" he ejaculated, rolling up his bleared eyes in virtuous indignation as he loudly smacked his lips. "To tote sech dew o' heaven 'round in his pocket, an' then coax a feller critter an' a gentleman to p'izen hisself with sech sp'iled coffin-warnish like them wampresdish out back yender! It's high treason—no less! Good Lawd!" as his eyes closed in ecstasy, one hand grasping the half-emptied flask while the other rubbed his stomach. "Ef I on'y hed a neck like a telegraph pole, an' this bottle was a hog'shead!"

Though reluctantly, Uncle Fuller lowered the flask, producing an empty bottle from his pocket into which he carefully proceeded to empty the remnant of liquor. When the last drop was drained, he smelled long and hungrily at the flask, then hurled it spitefully against the rocks, chuckling aloud as the frail glass parted into a thousand splinters.

"You'll never tell the tale, and let me alone fer keeping the stingy critter from gittin' cluss enough to smell my breath afore the fragrance is all gone to never-come-back! To tote sech honey-dew, an' never say a word about it! Sech a critter ain't fit to live with hogs—no he ain't!"

But this just indignation did not last long. The truly generous liquor he had swallowed began to have its effect on the bummer, and his thoughts took a more placid turn, though the slimy trail of the evil serpent was over all.

"Ef they was only the one! Ef they wasn't two on em! Whar'd the other come from? Durn that!" with a savage scowl, snarling. "The p'int is, which is which? They wasn't only the one Bill Courtright, then; now they's two! Both on 'em black-eyed—both the same age, shape, face an' all! Thar's a big bonanza in the right one fer me—but how to tell 'em one from t'other? How kin I know I'm puttin' my finger onto the same Bill Courtright I knowed back yender? How kin I be sure I ain't lettin' out

the hull secret to an enemy who's strong enough to fight me 'way from the trough when feedin' time comes? That's the p'int that sticks through the hide!"

As though in hopes his stolen liquor would sharpen his wits or drive away the bewildering fog that had so suddenly obscured the attractive prospect his cunning greed had discovered, Uncle Fuller took one more drink. If not the idea he sought for, it apparently gave him another, for with a start he uttered a grating oath, glaring half-menacingly, half-ferociously around him as he huskily muttered:

"'Nother snag ahead or I'm a-howlin' liar! What brung that cussed bloodhoun' here? What's he want, playin' prospector, makin' a gentleman own up the truth was a lie? Ef he's on the same trail—ef he's struck the lead to my bonanza—ef he's huntin' fer Bill Courtright, too!"

His soliloquy abruptly ceased and he crouched lower beneath the bushes as the sound of voices and approaching footsteps were heard. He recognized the tones of the Barnacle, and as they seemed to come to a halt, he cautiously parted the bushes sufficiently to give him a peep at them.

Aristabulus Boythorn and Frank Lightfoot were together, now looking back toward a rapidly-approaching figure, which the spy at first mistook for that of Frederick Lyon. He was not long in discovering his error, however, since he was near enough to catch every syllable uttered by the party.

"Mr. Lightfoot, I was in search of you." "At your service, Mr. Burgess," bowed the young man. "May I ask after Miss Burgess? She sustained no serious injury?"

"Not even the slightest blister, thanks to you, my dear sir," and the usually cold, reserved mine-owner grasped and wrung the hands of the young man with generous fervor. "But she could not rest until I sought you out and offered my aid to her generous rescuer. You are scorched, I see. Permit me to attend to your injuries. You need not hesitate," with a short laugh; "for time was when I practiced medicine, though I long since took in my shingle."

Though these words were uttered with apparent lightness, it needed not a very close observer to note the frown, the hardness which settled over the face of the mine-owner as he ceased. And lying low in his covert, Uncle Fuller clapped both hands over his mouth in the desperate effort to smother the yell of triumph which rose in his throat.

Frank Lightfoot laughed softly as he held up his shapely hands for inspection. There were a few red spots, several small blisters, but plainly nothing worth making a fuss over.

"Could I trust such a critical case into any hands without first demanding sight of a diploma as guarantee that the necessary skill was not lacking? My dear sir," with sudden earnestness, his fine, generous countenance flushing, his bright blue eyes growing sober as he spoke, "were I seriously scorched, the tidings you have brought would make my hurts well again. I feared for Miss Burgess, not myself."

He ceased abruptly, for he could not avoid noticing the air of cold reserve, if not positive displeasure, with which the mine-owner received his enthusiasm. And after a few more remarks, they parted, Jeter Burgess hastening back to his home and daughter, while Lightfoot and Aristabulus moved past the covert where the bummer lay smothering his exultation as best he could until all were beyond earshot. Then he rose, and grinning all over his face, muttered:

"That settles it! I'm out o' the wilderness at last, an' ef I don't tetch the fust o' that blessed bonanza afore another day rolls by, kick me fer a football!"

"To think! He here too! I knowed I'd see'd him afore, an' when he spoke o' the pill-bags, it placed him like a micel! He was thar—he was the doctor who made the 'zamination; an' ef Bill Courtright tries to kick over the traces, mebbe I kin bring in the medicine-man to good 'vantage."

A sudden suspicion cut his soliloquy short once more, and he sat staring with lack-luster eyes at vacancy while his grimy paw slowly and dubiously rubbed his bristling chin.

If Frederick Lyon was the man once known as William Courtright—if Jeter Burgess was indeed the doctor whose evidence at the inquest in the Blackhawk region, years ago, had done so much to fasten the brand of Cain on the missing brother—why were they both here, living in amity, in partnership? Was it only a caprice of fortune? Or—and the plotting tramp grated his teeth fiercely—had they come to an understanding, in which, for some valuable consideration, the doctor passed a damp sponge across the past record?

"Let him look a little out, ef that's the game he's playing! I hain't tuck all this trouble—spent all this time an' thinkin' how to git at the bonanza—to hev another snout in the trough now that it's comin' nigh feedin'-time! Keep off, doc, onless you're proof ag'in' the drugs you used to han'le!"

"An' es fer you, Bill Courtright; they's only

one way to keep your thrapple out o' the noose. Come down freely with the *oro*, an' you kin keep on w'arin' your smooth mask tell the eend o' all. But kick up rusty, an' murder will out, in a red-hot hurry, you bet!

"Then fer him—the bloodhoun'! He don't want the truth to leak out. Why? Beca'se he's on a big trail? Beca'se he's got wind o' the Courtright case? Ef not, what's he here fer, onder kiver—an' he a officer o' the law, a detective? Look a little keerful, Frank Lightfoot, or you may run ag'in' somethin' like this!" he grated, drawing a vicious-looking knife from his rags, plunging it to the hilt into the earth as he added: "Good man as you think yourself, 'tain't many sech as them you could stan', cuss an' double cuss you!"

CHAPTER V. THE FIRE FIGHT.

THE accident which had happened to the throne and its fair occupants, just when the ceremonies so carefully planned and arranged were about to commence, threw all into disorder and confusion, bidding fair to make the whole celebration end in a miserable and dismal failure.

Willing hands soon cleared away the charred fragments of the throne and its background, leaving that end, like its opposite, open to the air and light of day; but when that was accomplished, even the most energetic was at a loss what to do next. Had the unfortunate fire done no worse than to destroy the beauty and symmetry of their proud pavilion, though grief might have filled the hearts of those whose long-boarded finery had vanished in smoke, a local pride would have kept even those from slacking their efforts to make the double anniversary one never to be forgotten in the annals of at least that portion of the Centennial State. But the sight of that motionless figure borne so carefully through their hushed ranks, with thoughts of what might possibly be the outcome of that luckless salute, drove all thoughts of merry-making from their minds for the time being.

Only until the tall form of Frederick Lyon was seen moving across the grounds, smiling and shaking hands, spreading the joyous news that their beauteous Goddess of Liberty, Cleonice Lyon, had received no serious injuries. Then the wild, glad cheers rung out until the very hills seemed to shake and quiver with the echoes they sent back. And then, though there was little attempt made to follow out the precise programme, the citizens fairly "turned themselves loose," with a laudable desire to make up for lost time.

Of course there was speaking—when did an American crowd ever get together without "a few remarks" of some sort?

Frederick Lyon made a brief address from the foot of the ruined throne, begging their indulgence, even while urging them to suffer no thoughts of him or his to cut their merriment short or abridge their sports in even the slightest degree. Though his place was beside his daughter, he would be with them in spirit, and they would best please him by pleasing themselves. And since he could not carry out the portion of the programme which they had, in their kindness, assigned to him, he took pleasure in introducing to their consideration, Colonel J. Romeo Freestone, the latest, but by no means the least, addition to their beautiful city.

Bowing low, the mine-owner made his escape, leaving the aspiring young editor and publisher to give the hungry congregation the Declaration of Independence, with variations and all the modern improvements.

After the speechifying came the barbecue, and the citizens ate raw meat and tasteless cinders after the regulation fashion, firmly believing in their boundless patriotism that they were enjoying themselves hugely!

And thus the day passed away, filled with noise and confusion, with eating and drinking, shouting and screeching, with burning of powder in the shape of blank cartridges and giant crackers—for the burly diggers, now they had so many to keep them in countenance, seemed delighted with the idea of playing boy once more—but through it all there was not one instance of rowdiness or ill nature. Drunken men there were, and plenty of them, long before the sun hid himself behind the western ridge; but there was no quarreling, no fighting.

There were the usual sports which accompany celebrations of this sort in the less sophisticated regions of our great country. Here were jolly diggers blundering through the clumsy sack-race, hopping, rolling, tumbling hither and yon in the blind attempt to reach the appointed goal. Yonder stood a slender pine sapling, stripped of its bark and coated thick with soap and grease. From the apex dangled a rag, well weighted with gold, the reward of merit, the wages due the man who had pluck and persistence enough to mount thus high above his fellow-creatures.

But why even attempt a description? Those who have witnessed a celebration of the sort, can imagine what it was when the miners, from youth to gray age, gave themselves over to the spirit of the moment, proving themselves more

boyish than they had been in their school days; while those who have not been thus favored, could not comprehend the wild, rollicking, lawless and yet orderly manner in which the worthy citizens enjoyed themselves, though a dozen columns were given up to descriptive writing.

Though thus far there had been nothing to frighten or offend the women who graced the scene with their presence, as the shades of night began to fall, they gradually withdrew from the celebration grounds, to return to their homes. Not so the men. They did not often have a holiday of this sort, and they were bound to have their fun out. And then strange faces and figures began to make their appearance, amid yells and whoops of laughter. Men with frightfully deformed bodies. Men with heads of abnormal growth, with grotesquely exaggerated features, with garments that would have set a drunken Indian wild with envy, or made a scarecrow bury itself below the corn it sought to guard, through pure despair. It was as though a vast museum of monstrosities had broken loose and poured its inmates down on this pleasant plateau.

In the days long gone by, an exhibition of "Fantasticals" as they were termed, was no very extraordinary occurrence, but it may well be questioned whether this was not their first appearance west of the Missouri—certainly never before did the mystic crew honor a mountain mining-camp with their company.

With masks and make-up none the less ridiculous or hideous for being of home manufacture, armed with whatever taste fancied or that would make the most noise, the Fantasticals paraded around the grounds, certainly enjoying themselves if they did not hugely please those of the gentler sex who lingered to see the "circus" before retreating homeward.

As the darkness deepened the fireworks were set off, the dazzling creations being greeted with shouts and cheers and sundry little screams of delight that told plainly enough all of the fair sex had not deserted the grounds; or, if having departed, they had ventured back, for "just one more peep!"

This was no very difficult matter. Independence City was built at the foot of a rocky range. Nearly a hundred feet above its level lay the plateau which had been selected as the celebration grounds. This was almost level as a floor, relieved here and there by tall trees and clumps of shrubbery.

Through a deep defile in the range poured a goodly sized river, cutting through rock and soil, forming one boundary of the plateau. Roaring, foaming, brawling with many a swift eddy and boiling swirl, the waters tore along the canyon, three-score feet below the level of the plateau. The wall was fairly perpendicular in places; in others the width was greater below than at the top, as though the mad waters were gradually undermining the plateau; at no place near by was it possible for even the surest-footed, the most active man to descend the wall unaided by ropes.

After skirting the plateau for some distance, the river made a curve, ate once more through the range where had once been a pass but little higher than the celebration-grounds were now, then ran its course until it reached the plain, three miles away from Independence City.

Among those whom curiosity drew to the grounds after the shades of night descended was Mora Burgess. Though her parent had made his head-quarters at the camp for the past four years, this was the first season Mora had passed there, she being absent at school. Thus all this was new to her, and having heard so much for weeks and weeks past of the glorious times that day was to witness, it was natural enough her wishing to see at least the closing scenes, having so rudely been driven from the stage at an early hour.

Hence it was that, none the worse for her adventure, Mora scaled the hill and took up a station somewhat removed from the bustle and confusion, leaning on the arm of her father. It was quite dark where they stood, but this made objects beyond all the more distinctly visible by the red glare of the many torches and the huge bonfires. Thus at first; but then the torches were extinguished and all save one of the fires put out, causing Mora to cling closer to her father's arm.

"Surely that is not all?" she uttered in disappointed tones. "If so, it was hardly worth the trouble of climbing up the hill!"

"Wait a bit, little girl," said Jeter Burgess, with a low laugh of satisfaction. "The sport is jurt about to begin, and if the lads carry out the hints I gave them, you will witness a sight which will richly repay you for your trouble."

"You, father?"

"Ay! And old as I am growing, only for you, little one, I'd be in the front rank of the fight to-night!"

"Surely, they don't mean to fight? they seem all in good humor," murmured the half-frightened girl.

"A fight that will be marked by few hard feelings and less bloodshed, my dear, but for all that, fighting you are fated to behold this night. Look! there goes the first shot!"

As he spoke, a bright light suddenly appeared, was whirled around the head of a dimly revealed mask, then shot upward and outward, forming a pretty curve as it fell to the earth, still blazing, casting a circle of light around it. And as though this was the signal, a dozen fireballs shot through the air, accompanied by wild yells and bursts of laughter as the Fantasticals darted here and there, armed with forked sticks with which to handle the glowing missiles, dodging the roaring meteors and deftly catching and hurling them back to their senders. Truly it was a wild and peculiar scene!

"It was from the lips of my grandmother that I first heard of these fire-fights, as they were called," hastily explained Jeter Burgess, hugely enjoying the childish delight which Mora betrayed as the fun waxed fast and furious. "It was a common enough thing, in those far-off days, and when all brains were taxed to contribute something to make this day memorable, I remembered her description. You see the result."

A little cry escaped the lips of the maiden, and her fingers closed tightly around the arm of her supporter. By the white light of one of the fireballs, she caught sight of a bold, handsome face. It seemed without a body, the ball passed so swiftly, and to this, in part, must be attributed her cry.

Trembling, blushing furiously in the darkness, Mora might have kept the secret of her outcry and agitation, but for what followed so closely.

"An alien—an enemy—a spy!" cried as many voices, amid wild laughter as the face and figure of one undisguised became noticed among them. "Down with him! Fire and flames!"

That was enough. One of the rules governing the fire-fight had been violated, and though this was doubtless through ignorance, the revelers were just in the humor to make the most of the opportunity thus offered.

Yelling and whooping they surrounded the man who had ventured in his ignorance to cross their battle-ground, and then in swift succession the blazing balls of fire were showered upon his devoted head.

Until then, he never so much as suspected the real cause of the increased uproar, but as the balls came faster and faster, making it a difficult matter to dodge them all, he saw the point and made the best of a desperate situation.

This it actually was, though the revelers meant no harm. The fire-balls were of oakum, tightly wound and thoroughly saturated with oil and alcohol, and as they roared through the air, the ignited fluid would fall in blazing drops. When they struck against a human or the ground, a little blaze would mark the place for a few moments, unless promptly extinguished by the one struck.

"Lightfoot, I declare!" exclaimed the mine-owner, as the many-glancing lights plainly revealed the face of the man thus suddenly assaulted.

"He will be killed!" gasped Mora, trembling, yet unable to turn her face away from the thrilling scene.

"No, it is only play," was the hasty reply, though the brows of the speaker drew together darkly. "Why don't the lad break his way through—hal gallantly done!"

Surrounded on all sides, pelted with fire-balls from every direction, Frank Lightfoot leaped swiftly to and fro, knocking the missiles aside whenever he could with his forearms or elbows, but making no effort to burst a passage through his assailants. That this was not through either bewilderment or fear, was plainly enough evidenced by his laughing countenance as revealed by the flashes of white light. He seemed to enter fully into the wild spirit of the fight, and while saving his face and guarding his person as best he might, he was drawing a pair of thick gloves on his hands. It was when he succeeded in accomplishing this that Jeter Burgess burst out with that enthusiastic cry.

No longer trying to knock the fiery missiles aside, Frank Lightfoot caught them in his protected hands and swiftly hurled them back, in a few moments decidedly turning the tide. Securing by the aid of his gloves, far better command of the fireballs than those who depended on the forked sticks, Lightfoot made no wild shots, but sent the blazing missiles straight home, so swiftly, so unexpectedly that, beaten at their own game, the revelers broke and scattered in confusion. And then, with a mocking laugh, the young athlete leaped from the lighted scene into the gloom without, vanishing from sight before they had time to recover from their surprise.

Himself partially blinded by the transition from light to darkness, Frank almost ran against the mine-owner and his daughter before he noticed their presence.

"It was gallantly done, my dear sir!" cordially cried Jeter Burgess, grasping his hand, warmly. "You seem intended by nature to get the upper hand of fire. Mora, child, this is the gentleman who so gallantly preserved your life, to-day."

As though she needed that reminder! But with a little more courage than she might have displayed without it, Mora also took the hand

of the young man, and pressing it warmly, poured forth her thanks as only a graceful, well-bred woman can, without making both herself and the recipient uncomfortable. As it was, the young athlete seemed strangely anxious to tear himself away, and with a few muttered expressions, he vanished as suddenly as he had appeared.

"A well-appearing young fellow, child," said the mine-owner, in a somewhat patronizing tone. "Really, I must keep an eye on him. I may manage to put something worth while in his way, if he proves to be as worthy as he is bold."

Before Mora could make any answer, there came the quick pounding of hoofs, and a horseman swept up to their side, dimly revealed by the starlight. With a little cry Mora shrunk back from him, and no wonder! Dressed in tight-fitting garments, with the horns, tail and cloven feet popularly attributed to the foul fiend, the new-comer flung a ball of fire at their feet, laughing long and loud at the maiden's terror.

With an angry exclamation Jeter Burgess kicked the ball away, only to go down from a crushing blow on the head, while Mora was caught up in the arms of the mad rider. His wild laugh was mingled with her scream of mingled fear and pain; then the white horse dashed swiftly away along the very verge of the canyon, a score bounds carrying it and its double burden into the moonlight where they were plainly visible to the startled and confused revelers.

As the demon rider turned to send back a taunting yell, Mora freed her lips from the heavy hand, and sent out a wild appeal for help. And in answer came two swiftly-successive shots from the darkness.

With a dying scream the horse plunged headlong, hurling its riders over its head. They reeled for a moment on the verge, then, with a wild scream, both disappeared from view!

CHAPTER VI.

EVERY INCH A MAN.

FRANK LIGHTFOOT exhibited far more awkwardness in retreating from this wholly unexpected interview with Jeter Burgess and his fair daughter, than he had displayed in baffling the boisterous attack of the revelers; yet he did not seem one to be frightened by bright eyes and a sweet voice, and his face had flatly belied him that day if its owner did not feel a more than common interest in the fair maid.

He was breathing quick and hard when he reached cover, and pausing, glanced back toward those whom he had left so abruptly. His hands clinched tightly, and he seemed to be doing battle with some powerful emotion.

From where he now stood the figures of Jeter Burgess and his daughter were barely visible, and would probably have passed wholly unseen unless by one who knew just where to look and what for. Yet Frank Lightfoot singled them out from the surrounding shadows, and his keen eyes were able to distinguish the form of Mora from that of the mine-owner.

"I won't believe it!" he muttered, sullenly fighting against his own convictions. "Such a charming flower cannot spring from a root so corrupt. Mora—my innocent darling, my light, my love! She the daughter of the wretch whom I have so solemnly sworn to hunt down to the gallows? She the offspring of the accursed fratricide—of William Courtright? Bah!" with a low, bitter laugh of self-contempt; "long brooding over the dark past has unsettled my brain, and I see ghastly phantoms where none exist in reality. To-morrow—"

The abrupt appearance of that diabolically-arranged rider before the two beings on whom he was gazing with such tumultuous thoughts, gave another direction to the turbid current; and with a vague idea that the woman, whom he had learned to love as he once believed he could never love, might require the protection of his strong arm, Frank Lightfoot moved slowly toward the spot.

He saw the ball of fire leave the hand of the mock Mephistopheles, and a short, angry exclamation escaped his lips as he sprung forward to the rescue. Not that he thought any danger, beyond a little annoyance, threatened the mine-owner and his daughter. He, naturally enough, imagined this cunningly disguised shape was one of the Fantastics, whom liquor and excitement had caused to forget for a moment the respect due to the gentler sex. Unfortunately, in the darkness his foot was caught by a trailing vine, and he fell heavily forward upon his hands and knees. And before he could recover himself, the dastard blow was delivered that sent Jeter Burgess reeling to the ground, the light form of Mora was caught to the red breast of the audacious rider, the good horse sprung away, and back came that taunting laugh.

But Frank Lightfoot caught the terrified scream which escaped the lips of the maiden as the diabolical horseman snatched her from the ground, and leaping to his feet he glared madly around. Only for an instant. Then he caught sight of the white horse and its double burden just as they passed from the gloom into the clear light of the moon, racing along recklessly

close to the edge of the canyon. And then the red rider turned to mock the stupefied revelers—then the poor girl managed to free her lips long enough to utter that wild appeal for help!

Even while rising, the right hand of Frank Lightfoot armed itself mechanically, and now his actions were swift as thought and unerring as fate itself. Up and forward shot his hand, and though the best of marksmen, the strongest nerved might well have hesitated before risking a shot at that distance and in that uncertain light, not so with him.

That one comprehensive glance had shown him the prostrate form of Jeter Burgess, lying like one dead. He knew that this could be no idle exploit of a drunken reveler, and instinct told him that Mora Burgess was in deadly peril, if not of death, of a fate still more to be dreaded. He knew that a score more bounds of that good horse would carry the bold abductor across the space of moonlight, and once in the gloom, well mounted, escape for the villain would be only too sure.

Swift reflections such as these lent him decision and steadied his nerves, and coolly as though firing at an inanimate target, Frank Lightfoot sent his lead on its mission.

But even his marvelous nerve failed him for an instant as he witnessed the result of those desperate shots. He saw the white horse plunge forward, death-stricken; he saw the red-garbed rider, still clasping the form of the maiden to his breast, hurled over the head of the dying beast, alighting on his feet, only to reel and totter, then, casting the maiden aside as though hoping to save himself by sacrificing her, fall over the escarpment with a wild yell of rage and terror!

And a choking groan burst from the lips of the young man as he saw the form of the maiden, who he now knew to be dearer far to him than life itself, strike on the very verge of the abyss, then slip over, to almost certain death!

"Merciful Father!" he gasped, covering his eyes, and shuddering violently, "I have slain instead of saving her!"

But only for an instant did this weakness last. Then the young man leaped forward and gained the spot where he had lost sight of the girl, as he feared forever. He knelt on the edge of the canyon wall and looked over, only to almost lose his senses and tumble headlong down to the whirling waters far below—for there, hanging to a small clump of vines and bushes, he beheld Mora Burgess, her pale face upturned, her eyes fixed appealingly upon his.

"Alive!—not dead! Father in heaven, I thank Thee!" broke impulsively from his lips as he made this truly astounding discovery, and there is no saying to what pitch his joy might have mounted, only for the appeal which came faintly from the lips of the endangered maiden:

"Help! My strength is failing—I will fall—help!"

"Hold fast, for your life!" he cried in return, brought back to earth by that imploring sound.

"Hold fast but for one little minute, and I'll save you, my darling!"

He hardly knew what he was saying, but none the less were his wits busily at work. He saw that the maiden was suspended wholly by her arms, some twenty feet below the escarpment, and that there was nothing to break her fall save the whirling waters far below. A backward glance showed him the dead horse, as well as that not one of the revelers were as yet coming to the rescue.

Startled, confused, the majority of them believed this but a portion of the wild sport in which they themselves were engaged, while those who did realize that something tragic was passing before their eyes, were so taken by surprise that they knew not what to do first.

Frank Lightfoot leaped back to where the white horse was lying, a dozen feet from the escarpment, snatching the coil of rope from where it hung at the saddle-bow. He saw that the slip-noose was firmly closed around the horn, and only pausing to shout to the startled spectators, he leaped back to the canyon, dropping over it feet foremost, letting the rope slip through his hands as he looked below to guide his descent.

Those wild, terrified eyes beheld his bold action, and as he rapidly descended to her level, the poor girl gasped:

"Thank Heaven! I am—Mercy!"

Her strength was failing her. The frail bush slipped a few inches through her hands, and only the fear of the frightful fall kept her from entirely losing her hold. As it was, despair enabled her to maintain her weight and check her descent, but it could only last a moment.

Frank Lightfoot realized this by instinct, and his movements were swift as thought. With one turn of the lasso round his leg, and bending his other leg around both, he could make use of his hands for a few moments without great danger of falling. And swiftly passing the doubled rope around the body of the maiden, directly beneath her arm-pits, he knotted the lasso firmly—just in time.

With a faint, indistinct murmur, the senses of the overried girl gave way, and she hung a lifeless weight on his hands, almost tearing him from his precarious hold and hurling him

down to meet his death in the whirling waters below!

Swiftly yet steadily he suffered the rope to pass through his hands until the maiden hung at the end, her weight causing the slender rope to cut painfully into the flesh of his leg, his own weight being added to the strain. Grasping the rope with his hands as he straightened up again, Frank Lightfoot soon succeeded in extricating his limb, but as he did so, his heart seemed to leap up into his very throat.

He felt the rope gradually giving and himself slowly descending the face of the canyon wall. He knew that their united weight was dragging the carcass of the horse over the smooth rock on which it rested. He remembered, now, that the rock inclined toward the escarpment, and this fact accounted for the curious circumstance, for otherwise double their united weight could not have moved the dead animal.

Uttering a loud cry for aid, he glanced swiftly around him, and fearing to delay a moment, he reached out and caught hold of the only support that was within reach just then; a scrubby cedar whose roots seemed to pierce the solid rock, for assuredly there was not the slightest trace of soil to be seen at that point.

Under any less critical circumstances, Lightfoot would have hesitated long before trusting his life to such a frail support, but he only paused long enough to give the bush one heavy tug, then released his hold on the rope and swung himself to the left, directly beneath the cedar, uttering a silent thanksgiving as a keen look assured him that the rope now remained stationary, no longer descending with its precious burden.

A slight crackling sound close above his head called his attention to his own support, and he instinctively reached out one hand and caught the rope as he felt that his weight was too severely testing the powers of the cedar bush. Thus distributing his weight, he carefully moved his feet over the nearly smooth face of the canyon wall, seeking for a support to which he might trust himself. And brave, strong-nerved though he undoubtedly was, he gave a long breath of relief as the toe of one boot found a narrow resting-place on a projecting point of rock.

Once more he raised his voice in an appeal to the demoralized revelers, bidding them make haste to rescue the lady from her still perilous position. But the words were rendered dim and indistinct to even his own ears by the roaring of the waters below, as they tumbled and eddied, whirled and chafed against their rocky boundaries both above and below. And with a weird curiosity which he could not master for the moment, he twisted his neck until he could gaze down upon them.

At this point the wall of the canyon, if anything, leant inward as it descended to the water. Directly below the point where two lives depended upon such frail hopes, the river formed an oval pool, the moonlight dimly revealing the foam-specked water as it whirled rapidly round and round before shooting through the slightly narrowing passage below.

It was not a comforting sight, and with a little chill of apprehension, Frank Lightfoot once more lifted his eyes, gathering his breath for another shout. But it burst forth in a cry of joy as his eyes caught sight of human faces peering over the escarpment, and he shouted:

"Catch hold of the rope and draw the lady up—carefully! She has fainted, and is unable to help herself."

So intense was his relief that he could not help laughing aloud as he saw the looks of stupefied amazement on the unmasked faces of the revelers, and caught their exclamations of bewildered wonder. And releasing his hold of the rope, he trusted his entire weight to the frail cedar and the rocky projection on which one toe rested.

Once more he cried aloud for them to make haste.

"Pull on the rope—carefully, or you'll injure the lady against the rocks! Save her, then lower the rope for me. Lively lads, if you know the meaning of such a term!"

There was some excuse for this impatient doubt. Even now the men above, the majority of whom were too full of strong liquor to have full possession of their wits, seemed unable to comprehend how much rested on their prompt action, and it was only when the husky voice of Uncle Fuller shamed them into action, that the rope with its fair burden began to crawl up the face of the rock.

As it did so, the body swung around, and to avoid being bit by it, Frank Lightfoot swerved suddenly to one side. A low cry escaped his lips as he felt the point of rock crumble and give way, bringing his whole weight upon the frail cedar, which snapped and cracked as though being torn from its support.

Instinctively he reached out one hand to clutch the rope, but he was too late. Already the body of the maiden was on a level with his head. He could have clasped her waist—might have clung to her ankles and thus been saved; but with a true manhood he resisted the temptation until it was too late.

"Lively, lads!" he cried, sharply. "I can't hold out—"

The cedar was plainly giving way, and with a desperate nerve, he drew up his feet, using both them and his hands to thrust himself far out from the wall, then shooting down—down!

CHAPTER VII.

SEARCHING THE CANYON.

So much time was lost by the gaping revelers before they could fully comprehend that their aid was needed to succor human lives, that Jeter Burgess recovered from that stunning blow, and guided by the ringing shout of Frank Lightfoot, he was one of the foremost in reaching the spot where the white horse lay stiffening in death. His was one of the first faces that peered over the escarpment, but a horrible fear deprived him of the power of further motion for a few seconds as he beheld the pale face of his beloved child, floating below him as though hovering in mid-air without substantial support.

By that dim light their first glances failed to note the rope by which the pale-faced girl was depending, and on their faces was written the superstitious fancies which began to assail liquor-befogged brains, when Lightfoot repeated his impatient directions. Even then they lacked a leader, until Uncle Fuller grasped hold of the rope and howled:

"He-yo-heave an' altogether, boys! Durned ef I ain't plum' shamed o' sech a lazy outfit! He-yo—umph!"

All the revelers needed was a word of proper guidance, and seeing the ragged bummer tugging lustily at the taut lasso, a dozen pair of hands grasped it with such a will that the Argonaut, his powers no longer resisted, dropped to a sitting posture on the rocky soil with a force that extracted a loud grunt of mingled pain and disgust from his lips. Ten seconds later the trembling hands of Jeter Burgess closed upon the arm of his fainting daughter, and then she was lifted over the escarpment and borne hastily back from danger.

"Onhitch the rope!" cried Aristabulus Boythorn, who, finding no place for himself at the rope, was peering over the edge of the canyon wall. "They's another—durned ef they is, now! Good-by, John!"

Hardened as were his nerves by the life of hardships, peril and privation which he had led for many years, the honest Barnacle hastily averted his head and closed his eyes to shut out that frightful sight. But he could not close his ears to the wild cry that rung out even above the roaring of the waters, or that sullen sound that told of a human being plunging into the whirling pool, to meet almost certain death!

"Good-by, boys!" was the manner in which Aristabulus interpreted that hardly articulate cry; but may it not have been "Good-by, Mora?"

With their wits growing clearer with the passage of each moment, the men at the rope soon realized what had occurred, and they hastily rushed to the escarpment, leaning far over and striving to pierce the dizzy depths with their eager gaze.

By the twinkling of the stars, aided a little by the moon which was now well above the range of hills, they could just distinguish the water in the pool. And some of the keener-eyed among their number declared that they could make out the widening waves which marked the spot where the man had plunged down to his death.

"I don't reckon he ever knowed what hurt him, 'ater he hit the drink," soberly muttered Aristabulus Boythorn. "Ef they was any wind left into him by the tum'le, that knocked it west-end-an'-crooked in a burry, I warrant yel the pore devil was goin' head-over-appetite the last I see'd o' him, a good thousin' miles a hour!"

"Who was it? How did it happen? What does it all mean?"

A dozen voices asked these or similar questions, but when they paused for a reply, there was none to give it. But from them all came signs of relief and pleasure as the tall form of Frederick Lyon dashed out of the darkness into the moonlight, rapidly approaching the clustering forms near the fallen horse, for now they felt they would no longer lack a head to direct their movements.

His face white, stern and hard-set, Frederick Lyon brushed aside those who thought to first catch his ear with the marvelous tale, and in another instant he was kneeling opposite his partner, gazing anxiously into the pale face of the girl.

A brief period of breathless suspense, then a glad cry escaped his lips.

"She will live—she is not seriously injured!"

A cheer went up from the excited crowd, but it was cut prematurely short as the recollection of the man who had met his fate so recently came back to them vividly. And once more they tried to solve the mystery which—to them—overhung the entire affair.

Frederick Lyon helped Jeter Burgess to bear the still unconscious maiden further away from the spot, but his return was speedy. Stern and white-faced, he pointed down at the body of the white horse, his voice cold and hard as he spoke.

"Who was the villain, you ask? Are there

none among your number who have ever seen that horse before? Who would ride it on such a dastardly errand but its owner?"

A breathless pause, then a miner spluttered: "Ef it ain't, then I don't want a cent!"

"Find the owner of that horse, and you can place your hand on the dastard who dared to insult the flower of our city! Find him, dead or alive, and name your own reward. I make the offer on behalf of myself as well as my partner."

Rapidly the mine-owner uttered these words and one at least among his hearers believed he held the right clew to the motive which prompted that offer of blood-money. Uncle Fuller, while keeping himself modestly in the background, watched his intended prey closely.

"Frank Lightfoot owned that critter," said Aristabulus Boythorn, a certain doggedness in his tones and hard-favored countenance as he confronted the mine-owner. "We all know that. An' I know that a whiter boy never drewed the breath o' life then Frank!"

Frederick Lyon silently pointed toward the dead horse.

"Durn the odds!" replied the sturdy defender of the young athlete. "'Twouldn't be the fu'st time a hoss got stole to be used fer dirty work. Ef Frank hed any han' in the job, it was to shoot the critter an'—"

Just then, sobbing hysterically, Mora Burgess, supported by the arm of her parent, came forward.

"Save him—why do you stand here while—"

She was unable to say what she wished, and turned an appealing glance up into her father's face. He had only partially learned the truth from her broken ejaculations, but he hastened to add:

"There was some one who risked his life to preserve hers, and she insists that he is still hanging over there by—"

"Not much he ain't," interposed Aristabulus. "I see him peter out jest as you got the gal up atop the rock. A house couldn't 'a' tumbled straighter nur yit made a cleaner hole into the drink—I'll alays say that much for the pore critter!"

"Frank—dead! and for my sake!" gasped Mora, burying her head in the bosom of her parent, sobbing hysterically.

"She thinks it was Frank Lightfoot who rescued her," the mine-owner explained, hurriedly. "She's got the two mixed up, then," almost roughly cried Lyon, his black eyes glittering fiercely. "It was Lightfoot who tried to carry her away, as his horse here proves!"

"Not so—he saved—oh, father! help—I am falling!"

The poor child was able to bear no more. Her senses failed her, and bearing her in his arms as though he felt not her weight, Jeter Burgess hastened away from the plateau which for the second time on that ill-starred day had so nearly been the death-scene of his only child. But Aristabulus Boythorn caught eagerly at her words, and lost no time in improving to the utmost the hint they had conveyed to him.

"You hear that, all o' ye?" he exclaimed with an air of triumph. "You wouldn't b'lieve me when I was ready to take my 'davy I see Frank hangin' over the rock, like the little man he sart'ly is; but mebbe you'll take her say-so! Frank wasn't the devil as toted her off, but he was the gentleman as shot down a mighty good hoss an' then jumped over the ditch fer to save the dainty darlin'—deed, he jes' was, honey!"

"Le's s'arch the kenyon!" shouted one of the crowd. "We kin do it with ropes an' the boats. Whooray! That'll tell the tale, ef we find 'em!"

It was a proposition which seemed to meet the views of the entire crowd, unless Frederick Lyon might be the exception. A dark frown crossed his face, but it vanished as quickly as it came, and only the watchful bummer noted and interpreted it aright. And as he hung back in the rear, the fellow chuckled guardedly to himself, as he muttered:

"Bill's tuck a tumble to the 'tective, an' kinder skeers that he's layin' the pipes to ketch him fer that old bit o' work down the lower kentry. An' I knows another cove what won't weep his eyes out ef the cussed bloodhoun' is gone up."

Frederick Lyon advanced to the edge of the canyon, and gazed down into the gloom. It seemed an impossibility that a mortal being could survive such a fall, to say nothing of the reception he would meet with by the whirling, boiling waters, when once fairly in their clutches.

"As you think best, gentlemen," he said sharply, turning away from the brink. "It is barely possible we may be able to beat the waters down to the mouth, but if so, and our labors are to amount to anything, we must proceed systematically."

"You're boss—say what we want to do, an' we'll do it."

"Very well, I'll accept the command. Half a dozen of you run down and get horses, and ride to the boat-landing as fast as may be. Get into the boats and watch the riffles for anything floating down. If you catch a glimpse of

a body, secure it, no matter what the risk or trouble. That's enough. Go!"

He was obeyed on the instant, and then the mine-owner issued his further directions. A goodly quantity of light-weight rope was to be gathered up and taken to the point where the river debouched from the rocky hills.

"Of course we can't paddle the boats up through the canyon, but by the aid of ropes, with men on each side of the canyon to pull on them, we can warp up, I guess. Of course, if the body or bodies are not caught in some of the eddies, or lodged against some rock, we will be spared this trouble."

The explanation was sufficiently clear for those who were more or less familiar with the locality, and the citizens flocked away to the town in quest of the ropes.

Already those sent to patrol the river were mounted and galloping away for the point indicated, and it was not long before the rest of the company were following on their heels.

Though the river was fordable a short distance below the place where it left the hills for the plains, several rude boats were kept there, mainly for fishing purposes, and into the largest, stoutest of these, Frederick Lyon and three other men entered, Aristabulus Boythorn forming one of the number.

Ropes were attached to the boat, and with plenty of volunteers manning these, the search of the canyon was begun.

It was no child's play, even with the tow-ropes attached and so carefully managed as to keep the boat in the center of the passage, for the current was swift, even there.

"Wait ontel we git a little furdur in, an' then talk!" said one of the boatmen, dexterously using the stout pole he carried to sheer the boat away from the foam-crested top of a jagged rock, rendered visible by the blazing fire crate which protruded above the prow. "The fish we ketch this night won't be live ones—you hear me!"

"Yit you ain't werry dead, an' you come through the race with plenty o' wind into you, didn't ye?" retorted the Barnacle.

"Ca'se I was drunk—dead drunk," was the frank reply.

The incident was well known to all there present. While out on a prospecting tour, this man had fallen into the river and was swept through the canyon until thrown, more dead than alive, upon a bar some distance below town. It seemed incredible, but was none the less true.

Their progress was slow, owing partly to the tremendous current, partly to the fact that the party of men at the rope which led to the hill side of the river, had difficult ground to cross, there being at best but a narrow, shelving ledge for their foothold. One of their number led the way with a lantern, and thus they slowly advanced.

Frederick Lyon acted as steersman, while Aristabulus knelt in the prow, keeping a keen watch for any floating bodies. The other men guarded the boat from being hurled sideways upon the numerous rocks which parted the swirling waters, their strong arms and stout poles being called into requisition almost constantly. And after this fashion they proceeded for nearly an hour, when Aristabulus started to his feet with a yell of superstitious horror, dropping his pole and for a moment seeming actually on the point of leaping overboard.

At the same instant the party on the left bank let their rope slacken, and the boat turned a little sideways to the current. This turned the red light from the eyes of the rest in the boat, and they saw—what?

The white face and body of a man, seemingly floating down the mad waters, but seated astride the shoulders of one whose blood-red head bore two pointed horns—the head of Satan himself!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WATERS GIVE UP THEIR DEAD.

WHEN the treacherous point of rock crumbled beneath his toe—when the frail rooted cedar cracked and splintered beneath his weight—when he realized that long ere the form of the unconscious maiden could be drawn up to the level of the plateau, the noose removed and again lowered for him, he must be hurled downward to meet what seemed certain destruction, Frank Lightfoot saw his one faint hope and manfully grasped it while there was yet time.

From what he saw in that one swift downward glance, he felt a hope that there might be a considerable depth of water in the pool-like stretch directly below him, and making use of both hands and feet, he thrust himself as far out from the face of the cliff as circumstances would permit, for he knew that to strike against any projection in the canyon wall would insure his destruction.

Brave far beyond the common, with nerves like steel in the face of any ordinary peril, Frank Lightfoot felt a thrill of horrible fear as the cedar shrub gave way entirely, and it was to foil the wild yell of abject terror that rose in his throat that he uttered that last good-by—not to "the boys" as the worthy Barnacle declared, but to Mora, the woman to whom his whole heart was given, despite the black cloud which hovered over her past.

Knowing that unless he could strike the water feet-foremost, his chances of escape were indeed frail, the young athlete flung all his power of body and mind into that one effort as soon as he thrust himself out from the wall. For one breath of horror, it seemed to him that he was whirling rapidly end over end, but then his form steadied, grew rigid, and he struck the boiling waters feet-foremost.

With the old dread lest there should be an insufficient depth of water, Frank Lightfoot, the second he felt the touch of the cool element, flung out his arms and spread his legs as wide apart as nature would permit, using every effort to lessen the force of his plunge; but how far he succeeded in this, he never knew.

The swift descent through the air, combined with the heavy shock of entering the water, almost entirely deprived him of his senses, and though he kept his lips tightly closed and struggled to rise to the surface again, it was more through the workings of instinct than any reasoning process. The water bubbled and boiled about him, and it was to this fact, quite as much as through his own feeble, mechanical efforts that he did not sink beneath the surface, there to strangle and die.

Round and round the mad waters swept with him, and had it been in the broad light of day instead of night, the eager eyes on the cliff above must have detected him as he formed a helpless part of that mad dance, now rising to his shoulders on the curling waves, only to sink nearly beneath them; but all the time feebly, blindly swimming, in accordance with that strange instinct which so often survives when both sense and reason are buried in oblivion.

Frank Lightfoot knew nothing of all this, save as a man who is struggling against some frightful nightmare, for that fall and sickening shock had rendered him incapable of thought or reasoning for the time being, and it was by no effort of his that he escaped from that whirlpool, to be swept rapidly down the canyon.

Death was on every hand, but he could not comprehend the horrors from which, as by a succession of miracles, he was preserved. Madly the waters raced through their rock-bound confines, now whirling in a half-circle in obedience to some hidden impulse, now leaping straight onward like a frightened race-horse; now running smooth and even for a moment, only to break into a mass of foam and bubbles against the ragged crest of a sunken boulder; now sweeping the mechanical swimmer along within arm's length of the canyon wall, to touch which at that pace meant death, only to whirl him off to the center of the river the next moment.

And then the half-dead man was swept into an eddy where he floated slowly round and round in darkness which was increased by the overhanging wall of rock. And as the waves and current fought him less fiercely, his powers seemed to increase, his senses to slowly regain possession of his bewildered brain. And when his shoulder came in rude contact with a floating object, Frank Lightfoot clutched it with the grip of a drowning man.

It proved the one spur necessary to recall his wandering senses, and it was a man, not an automaton, that clung to the floating log!

"Not dead yet!" he gasped, drawing a long breath of life and tossing back the streaming hair from his eyes as he stared wildly around him. "I live, father, to keep the oath you dictated from your death-bed! If I fail or forget it, may—"

With a choking cry he broke off, seemingly first becoming conscious of the words he was mechanically uttering. And he shuddered, bowing his head with despairing shame, for had he not forgotten? Had he not, in spirit, if not in letter, proven false to that awful vow? And for what? For love for a pair of dark eyes!

As yet Frank Lightfoot had made no effort to drag himself up on the log against which the waters had swept him in that eddying pool, and by his body dragging in its wake, the log was gradually forced from the small circle of wheeling waters into the edge of the current. And after a brief struggle, the eddy was conquered, and the log with its human freight went rushing down the canyon.

The swift motion, with an occasional scrape of his feet against the bottom or sunken rocks, aroused Frank Lightfoot from the half-stupor into which he had fallen, and he attempted to drag himself up on the log for greater comfort and safety. But hardly had he begun, ere he desisted, with a choking cry of wonder.

As the log dashed through a rift of light, Frank caught sight of a red shape lying across the log, almost within reach of his arms. Though it was only a trunk, so to speak, that he saw, something told him he was sharing the float of a fellow-being!

He uttered a shout as the log passed into the gloom, but no answer came, and then, summoning his strength and nerve, the Miner Detective drew himself along until his hands rested upon the motionless form.

It was indeed a man, but one without sense or motion!

"The devil—the one who tried to carry off my

—Miss Burgess!" he gasped, so startled by the strange encounter that he almost lost his grasp on the log.

It was indeed so. Limp and motionless the man who felled Jeter Burgess with that felon blow—the man who so boldly attempted to abduct Mora Burgess—the man who was flung to his doom when the white horse fell with the lead of the Miner Detective in its heart—was lying across that log, his horned head and cloven feet hanging in the water! How he came there; whether in falling he had struck across the floating log, or had gained it after a desperate struggle, can only be surmised, for he never made an explanation.

After recovering from the first shock of this curious discovery, Frank Lightfoot again cautiously moved forward to learn whether or no the villain was alive. Owing to the precarious nature of his support, his examination was necessarily hasty and imperfect. He failed to receive any answer to his call or his shakings, and he believed the fellow was dead; but knowing, after his own marvelous escape from instant death, that it was barely possible life might be lingering in the scarlet-clad body, he resolved to guard it as long as possible.

Scarcely had he formed this resolve, than the log was drawn into another eddy, and in turning around, it fairly rubbed against the rock wall. And then, straining his eyes, Frank Lightfoot believed he saw a ledge of rock wide enough to afford support for them both, if he could only reach it.

By this time his senses were so nearly restored to their usual state that he was ready to snatch at almost any chance rather than risk a further descent of the canyon while darkness lasted, and as the log swept around once more, he caught the arm of the man in scarlet and flung himself from the log.

It was a desperate struggle, though his good right hand closed firmly over a point of rock. The waters tugged furiously at his person, while the body of the abductor was whirled and tossed back and forth, threatening to tear him from his hold; but doggedly, desperately the Miner Detective fought on, never ceasing his efforts until success rewarded them—until he dragged himself up from the bed of the river, still holding on to the body, and settled down upon the ledge.

It was barely sufficient to afford him support, but it was enough—better far than trusting to the log which he saw dimly as it yielded to the current and plunged down the canyon once more.

Securing the best possible position for safety and comfort, Frank Lightfoot dragged the body around until he held it head and shoulders above the water. The eddying current pressed it against the rock, thus lessening his labors, and enabling him to retain possession. Of a corpse, as he now felt assured.

"Alive, I would have saved him to meet the punishment his dastardly act deserved. Dead, I'll hold him for identification if the fates will that I am to escape this with life!" the athlete muttered.

And it was the sight of him sitting on the ledge, holding the scarlet, horned head supported between his knees, that filled the worthy Barnacle with superstitious horror.

For some time Frank Lightfoot had been aware of the approach of the boat party. He had shouted to them, time and again, only to have his voice drowned by the roaring of the waters. Satisfied of this, he wisely retained his breath for use in case he saw the party were about to abandon the quest, and now, as the boat whirled partly around, he shouted with all the power of his rested lungs:

"Boat ahoy! Can't you find room for a shipwrecked passenger in your little craft?"

"Who and what are you that calls?" cried Frederick Lyon, his face showing pale and ghastly by the red light of the fire grate in the prow. "Your name?"

"Frank Lightfoot!"

"I'll be durned if it ain't!" shouted Aristabulus Boythorn, recognizing the voice where he had failed to distinguish the face, thanks to that grim phantom of the horned head. "Buckle down to it, lad! We'll take him aboard ef he was ridin' a dozen red devils, 'stead o' one!"

Frank Lightfoot could not refrain from bursting into a laugh as he caught these words, but then he suffered the horned head to sink lower into the water, still clutching its hand as he cried aloud:

"It's the fellow who tried to abduct Miss Burgess!"

"Living, or dead?" sharply demanded Lyon, as the men at the ropes on the canyon walls urged the boat nearer.

"Dead, I believe. I found him in the water, and thought it best to freeze to him, if only for the purpose of identification," promptly replied Lightfoot, relaxing his grasp willingly enough as Aristabulus bent forward and caught hold of the scarlet object.

"A 'bolical-lookin' varmint as ever I clapped my two ole peepers onto—durned ef 'tain't now!" ejaculated the Barnacle as he dragged the body into the boat. "A purty-lookin' hoss

fer a white man to ride down a race-track like this!"

Gladly abandoning his precarious perch, Frank Lightfoot grasped the boat and dragged himself into it, giving a long breath of relief as he did so. Brave, strong-nerved though he was, he had not passed through the ordeal wholly unshaken.

Frederick Lyon made his way forward and thrust his hand inside the tight-fitting red suit, holding his palm over the heart for a score of seconds. Then, without a word, he returned to his place in the stern, waving his hand in mute command to the eager men on the walls above. By the light of the fire-grate, they saw and readily interpreted this gesture, and then the boat was allowed to float down the canyon.

There was comparatively little difficulty in effecting this portion of the trip, the main difficulty being in keeping the boat from tearing the ropes from their hands. Those in the little craft had only to keep it clear of the rocks which broke the surface, or occasionally fend off from the walls as a cross-current chanced to strike them.

Half an hour later the mouth of the canyon was gained, where the appearance of the boat was greeted with enthusiastic cheers as the waiting citizens counted an additional form, and thus became aware that the search had not proven unsuccessful; but Frederick Lyon paid no attention to them, deftly driving the skiff stern-first to land, stepping out and motioning the others to land. And then, as Frank Lightfoot stepped out, he grasped his hands—there was a metallic click—and the young man found himself handcuffed!

"What the—what do you mean by this, sir?" he cried, his voice hoarse, his blue eyes flashing fire.

"That I arrest you for trying to abduct Miss Burgess!"

CHAPTER IX.

A CHARGE DISPROVED.

THE ironed hands were tightly clasped together and lifted as though on the point of being dashed into the face of the speaker; but only for an instant. Then they were quietly dropped, and a short, contemptuous laugh parted the lips of the man who so unexpectedly found himself a prisoner.

"Well! I've heard of the man with the cheek of a Government mule, but for pure, unadulterated impudence, you deserve to carry the broom! What is the name of—"

"You'll find it no laughing matter, my man," sharply interposed Frederick Lyon, with one raised hand and shaking fore-finger lending emphasis to his words. "This may not be strictly according to rule, but so the ends of justice are served, men of our caliber care little for idle forms."

"Of either decency or common politeness, as I find it by no means difficult to believe," sneered Frank Lightfoot.

"A dastardly criminal is not supposed to take the same view of his capture as the one who helps to bring him to justice," coldly retorted the mine-owner.

As he spoke his hard black eyes were riveted on the face of the man whom he had so cleverly manacled, as though expecting a savage outburst on his part. For a breath, it seemed as though this would be the case, for Frank Lightfoot clinched his hands, his lithe form quivering with rage—but that was as far as he suffered resentment to carry him just then.

He saw that Frederick Lyon had one hand hidden, his elbow bent just enough to show that the member was resting on or against his hip. Instinct told him that the mine-owner was ready to shoot him down at the first show of resistance, even if those bitter words were not uttered with the express purpose of driving him into some such rash movement.

With a cold smile playing around his lips, Frank Lightfoot bowed slightly, his voice quiet and smooth as he spoke:

"Will you be so kind as to repeat the charge you made a bit ago? To mention the crime for which you considered it your duty as an honest man and perfect gentleman to arrest me?"

"For a criminal assault on the person of Jeter Burgess, and the attempted abduction of his daughter, Miss Mora," was the prompt response, and the voice of Frederick Lyon was that of one who fully believed in the truth of all he uttered.

With a hard, metallic laugh, Frank Lightfoot pointed with his manacled hands to the scarlet figure which still lay in the bottom of the boat.

"I, the abductor? Pray, my dear sir, what do you call that?"

"Your ally, for aught I know," was the reply, with the swift addition: "It may be even worse than that!"

"Indeed!" with a short laugh and exaggerated politeness. "May I beg of you to explain, my dear sir?"

"We all know that two men went over the wall of the canyon," coldly replied the mine-owner. "We know that one was a villain for whom death would be too easy a punishment, while the other was every inch a man—"

"Many thanks for the compliment," laughed

Frank Lightfoot, with a mocking bow. "After all, I'm not so sure but what you might pass for a gentleman in a crowd, provided you were to keep your mouth shut and your hands to your own pockets!"

The crowd of citizens who had feverishly watched the departure and return of the boat, to have their intensely wrought-up feelings still further heightened by this sudden and unexpected arrest, watched and listened with breathless interest.

Frederick Lyon was a "big man," in Independence City, and one whose bare word was generally as good as another man's sacred pledge. It was no easy matter to believe him in the wrong, but here he was going plainly against the evidence of their own eyesight, for there was not one among the entire party but was ready and willing to swear that the villain who dealt Jeter Burgess that dastard blow and attempted to carry off Mora Burgess on the white horse, was dressed in scarlet, after the fashion popularly attributed to the foul fiend; and was he not lying there in the bottom of the boat, dead?

But interested though they were, and vainly puzzling their brains to divine the clew by which Frederick Lyon was to find his way out of the labyrinth; thoroughly as they respected and honored him, it was beyond human power to entirely smother the laugh that leaped to their lips as Frank Lightfoot uttered that sublimely mocking speech.

The face of the mine-owner flushed hotly at the subdued chuckles, then turned white as polished marble. His voice betrayed no emotion as he resumed:

"We found you two in the water together, you living, he dead. What is to assure us that when the plunge was taken you did not wear that scarlet suit? Who can prove to us that you did not change clothes with him while we were searching for you, in order to throw dust in our eyes and thus cheat justice?"

There was no longer any laughing amidst the crowd; instead, low mutterings and exclamations.

"Durned ef it moughten't, now!" uttered one old miner, his gray head nodding vehemently to lend emphasis to his opinion. "Twouldn't be no curiousest nor his comin' through that hell o' waters with a hull bone in his karkidge!"

"Jest like a sick kitten mought like a full-grown grizzly!" cried Aristabulus Boythorn, pushing a little closer to the prisoner, his honest countenance filled with disgust. "It mought be possible, but afore you git the ole man to swaller any sech guff, some o' you that takes it in like mother's milk hes got to make the tum'le an' do the lightnin' change act while turnin' somersets down the flume! Talk is cheap, but I never saw the man smart enough fer to git drunk on wind, no matter how stiddy he stuck to biz!"

Frank Lightfoot listened quietly until the veteran had had his say, then he addressed Frederick Lyon.

"I am ready to believe that you are acting from a sober conviction of right, Mr. Lyon. For that reason alone I have quietly submitted to this disgrace, have listened to your hard words and harsh suspicions, instead of replying to them with my fists, as I felt so strongly tempted. But you have gone as far as even you can go, without having to answer for your words and actions."

"After you have answered to the crime with which you stand charged."

"By whom?" was the swift demand.

"By me, as a citizen of this town, as a man who has taken a solemn pledge to maintain the law as far as lies in my power, let who will be the sufferers," was the cold response.

Frank Lightfoot bowed coldly.

"It is the abuse, not the use of law against which I'm kicking. No one but an ass or a madman would even dream of suspecting me with such a crime, much less making the charge, when here are two-score good men who can swear that they saw me shoot the horse—my own, by the way, and a particular pet—and then save Miss Burgess from falling into the canyon."

"With changing characters, rather," was the swift interposition. "You had an abundance of time. You might easily have changed clothes with him, in order to throw us off the right scent."

"True; I might have swallowed the river and then walked down to meet you dry-shod—but I didn't," laughed the Miner Detective. "Suppose some of you gentlemen peel that fellow, and make sure it is not—Frederick Lyon, for instance!"

"Durned ef I don't, honey," cried Aristabulus, jumping into the boat and dragging forth the scarlet-clad figure, depositing it on the sands in the clear moonlight where all could witness the operation.

Frank Lightfoot pointed to the scarlet garment, which fitted the unknown like a second skin, saying sarcastically:

"You all can see that the garb is a misfit! It would be no difficult job to remove and don that again, in the mildly flowing waters—now wouldn't it?"

As he spoke, an expressive gesture called at-

tention to the difference in size which existed between himself and the corpse. The latter was half a head shorter, and of a thick, stocky build. The scarlet garb fitted him tightly, and even the most prejudiced could no longer believe that Frank Lightfoot had ever worn the suit, much less performed that suggested double change while battling for life with the mad waters.

But Frederick Lyon quickly uttered:

"For all that, he might have been your ally—your tool hired to commit the outrage."

"If so, why did I shoot the horse?" as swiftly interjected the accused. "I alone was in a position to cut him off, and that only by taking terribly long chances. If my tool or my partner, and acting according to my instructions, why did I not hold my hand and let him get safely away?"

At that moment Aristabulus Boythorn succeeded in cutting the scarlet mask from the face of the corpse, and holding the body partially erect, he suffered the moonlight to fall fairly athwart the countenance. With therest, Frederick Lyon bent forward to view the face. For a few moments all was silence; then a murmur arose. Not one of all those present recognized the face of the dead man. He was an absolute stranger.

Frederick Lyon, his face cold and hard-set, turned again toward his prisoner, saying:

"This is no positive proof in your favor, and as the chief officer of this town, I am compelled to hold you a prisoner until the matter can be thoroughly investigated. For your own sake I trust you will submit with a good grace. If not—"

"You will ballast me with lead—just so," laughed the accused; but there was little of mirth in either his face or his tones, while his big blue eyes gazed steadily into the black orbs of the man whom he now knew to be a bitter enemy.

Though he had only the moonlight to guide him, Frank Lightfoot fancied he saw a red flush sweep across the face of the mine-owner at this pointed speech, and though the words had fallen from his lips more as a taunt than aught else, he now felt that his shot had not gone wide of the truth. Yet he could think of no reason why the wealthy mine-owner should hate him so bitterly.

"If you attempt to escape, and can be stopped in no other manner, rest assured I will fire upon you," was the cold reply.

"Thank you for nothing, my dear sir! Now listen to me," with sudden earnestness. "I will neither flee nor will you keep me in confinement this night. I can prove that not five minutes before the fellow lying yonder attempted to steal away Miss Burgess, I was talking to her and her father, dressed in this suit you now see on me. She can bear evidence, if she—"

"She does!" came a clear, ringing voice; and then Mora Burgess appeared, together with her father, rapidly advancing.

The crowd parted and permitted them to pass through. And before the burning gaze of Frederick Lyon, the maiden grasped the ironed hands of the young athlete, bowed her fair head, and before he could divine or prevent the action, pressed her warm red lips to them! Then proud, defiant, she confronted them all, her voice ringing out clear and distinct:

"For shame, ye men who call yourselves honest and true! This gentleman saved my life almost at the expense of his own, and this is the manner in which you reward him. Ironed like a criminal. For shame, I say!"

Her indignant glance seemed to rest longest on the face of Frederick Lyon, and doffing his hat with a low bow, he said:

"If we have erred, Miss Burgess, it was through our desire to avenge your wrongs. If you are positive this person was not the one who so shamefully abused you, we—"

A motion of her white hand cut his speech short.

"This gentleman," emphasizing the title, "risked his life in my behalf. I plainly recognized him coming to my rescue when I hung there—Oh, it was awful, horrible!"

Her voice grew choked and, bowing her head, she covered her eyes with her hands.

Jeter Burgess stepped quickly to her side, passing a supporting arm around her waist, saying:

"I will answer for Mr. Lightfoot, with my life, if needs be! He was with us only a few minutes before that rascal came dashing up from the opposite direction. It would be an utter impossibility for him to have assumed such a disguise in that brief space of time. And then, I am almost sure I recognized his face and form supporting my child as she hung over the canyon-wall. I was too deeply agitated, on her account, but I can almost take my oath to that effect."

"Miss Burgess's word is all-sufficient," said Lyon, removing the handcuffs. "I owe you my sincere apology for allowing my feelings to carry me a little too far before due investigation, Mr. Lightfoot, and I humbly beg pardon for placing you under arrest," he said, in slow, measured tones.

"May you ever be as eager to bring crimi-

nals to justice, Mr. Frederick Lyon," replied the young man, turning away without further ceremony.

There was only one pair of eyes in all the crowd that noticed the start which the mine-owner gave at that speech, or marked the deep frown with which he watched the Miner Detective offer his arm to Mora Burgess, as the trio slowly walked away from the spot.

"Hit right whar he lives, that did!" muttered Uncle Fuller, beneath his breath, as he covertly watched the twain. "Nur it wasn't no stray shot, nuther—wuss luck! The pesky 'tective is struck the scent which leads up to my bonanza, but he'll never reach the other end o' the lead—not ef I kin stop him with lead or steel!"

Two hours later Frank Lightfoot was alone in his room at the hotel. He sat on the foot of his bed, his chin supported on his hands, moodily staring at vacancy, his face lined and haggard, his eyes red as though after a protracted debauch.

"Shall I probe deeper? Shall I put it to the test?" he muttered hoarsely, starting and staring around him fiercely at the unnatural sound of his own voice.

As he divined the truth, he resumed his position, but now there was a stern decision in his eyes.

"I must! With my hand on the pulseless bosom of the dead, I solemnly swore to never know rest—never suffer aught else to take precedence in my life—to bend every energy of mind and body to bring the vile criminal to justice! The dead heard my vow, and recorded it. It must be kept—it shall be kept, though I have to tear my foolish heart out and crush it in the dust beneath my own feet!"

"Love? What have such as I to do with that soft, silly passion? Little as I have seen and felt of it, I know it has weakened my hand and brain. Once, I would have struck swift and sure—now—her face rises up before me and bids me forget my oath! Bids me perjure myself to the dead, by holding my hand and permitting the blood-stained demon to live on and enjoy his wealth, gotten who knows how?"

Rising, he strode swiftly, silently, to and fro, his strong hands clinching and opening nervously, his face filled with strong and terrible emotions. Now and then his convulsed features would soften and grow milder, and in one of those brief intervals he muttered:

"Mora, my love, my queen! Ask me for anything but that! Ask me to lay my heart in the dust beneath your feet, and it shall be done, but do not ask me to prove false to the dead—to the man who wore out his own life in seeking to avenge the murdered—who died with that prayer on his lips—who took the solemn pledge from me, even while growing cold in death!"

"Never!"—his eyes glowing redly once more, his voice coming with grating vehemence through his tightly clinched teeth. "Despite the daughter, I will hang him if he proves to be the one I suspect. If you are really William Courtright, Jeter Burgess, you are doomed to the gallows!"

And at that same moment Uncle Fuller, in a drunken sleep, was dreaming of his bonanza; but his William Courtright was a very different person. Which one of the twain was right?

CHAPTER X.

ARISTABULUS BREAKS THE SLATE.

THE "glorious Fourth" had come and gone; Independence City had duly celebrated her emancipation; and if everything did not "go off" precisely in accordance with the programme as laid down beforehand, the occasion was one which would not soon be forgotten by the majority of those who participated therein.

After the rescue of Frank Lightfoot from the canyon, and his disappearance in company with Jeter Burgess and his daughter, the night was too far advanced for the citizens to think of returning to their interrupted fire fight, and by mutual consent, the celebration grounds were deserted for the town.

A respectable few went home and sought their couches, but the majority "made a night of it," bad liquor "flowing free as water," for no man who had either credit or money in his pocket spared them on such a glorious occasion. Among those who spent neither, might be named the ragged, dirty, hard-favored tramp, Uncle Fuller, but he was always foremost among those who lined the bar, and it would be no easy task to pick out a man in the entire city who "surrounded" more heavy drinks while the unusual harvest lasted.

But when the day began to dawn, the inevitable reaction came, and Uncle Fuller saw that his liquid greed was making him almost too prominent, and to avoid any unpleasant feelings he beat a retreat, having almost as much as he could stand up under. Seeking a retired spot just outside of town, he lay down and fell into a drunken slumber that lasted until near noon, when he awoke, feeling almost as miserable as he looked.

It was a decided case of "hot coppers to cool," and the tramp looked longingly toward the town as he struggled to a sitting posture,

hoping to see some of his new-found friends of whom he might expect an invitation to "poison himself."

But there was little astir in Independence City at that hour of the day, and less now than usual. All those who were not too lazy or too drunk to arise, had gone about their regular work, and Uncle Fuller huskily muttered:

"I got to hev my bitters, even ef I hev to pay fer 'em out o' my own pocket!"

He cast a stealthy, suspicious glance around him, then fumbled among his rags until he produced a bit of buckskin, tied and knotted after a most intricate fashion. Undoing the knots as well as he could with his trembling fingers, the tramp swept his vicinity suspiciously once more, then singled a few silver coins from the little store of gold. He tied up the more precious coins again, then rose and staggered over to the nearest saloon. Burning as was his thirst, he paused on the threshold when he saw that only the barkeeper was within. He saw by the sour look which greeted his appearance that there was little hope of beating a drink out of this worthy, and he felt the need of liquor too greatly to lose any further time in skirmishing around "for a soft snap." With a hollow sigh, he produced an empty bottle and bade the barkeeper fill it, only to have a blunt hint as to the color of his money.

"Jest set your figgers, an' I'll buy the hull durned shebang, cash down," he sniffed, his head in the air as he tossed the amount upon the bar. "Was lookin' fer a vestment, but I never deal with on'y gents of the fu'st water. Good-by, Johnny—I'll call on ye ag'in when I can't find no other place open. Ef anybody axes fer the Emp'r'r o' Rooshy, tell 'em I'm gone out promenoddin' fer my health."

With a dignified strut, the bumner left the saloon, but he had no sooner turned the corner than he paused and took a hasty drink of the vile stuff he had just bought. His nerves were all aquiver, and he felt the need of a stimulant.

"Durned nasty stuff fer to be paid fer out o' a man's own hard earnin's," he muttered, disgustedly, as he shambled back the way he came. "It'll hev to do, I reckon, an' I got to dip lightly onto it ontel I kin git the wires to workin' all hunky. It's a big bonanza, ole man, an' wants keerful workin', or mebbe—Hellow I say!"

Uncle Fuller caught sight of Aristabulus Boythorn at a little distance, half hidden behind a clump of bushes, and from his motions the tramp believed the Barnacle had just taken a drink. Instantly hiding his own flask, he uttered a shout that attracted the attention of the veteran, who growled out a surly reply. But Uncle Fuller was not a man to be easily daunted where he fancied there was a prospect of getting free liquor, and hastening to the spot where Aristabulus awaited him, he held out a grimy paw, grinning all over his face.

"Durned ef I knowed ye at fu'st, pard! Your head looks as big as mine feels, this mornin', an' it's 'most growed out o' my recollection. Take a ha'r o' the dog, pard—take a ha'r o' the dog that bit ye! An' jest to take the cuss off, don't mind ef I j'ine in with ye."

Aristabulus jerked his hand away from that hot, feverish grasp, growling surlily:

"You're too pesky fri'ndly, all to oncet! It's my 'pinion you're a fraud o' the fu'st water, an' I don't make no bones o' tellin' ye so, right in to your teeth. You've done nothin' but pump lies into my ears ever sence we fu'st struck each other, let alone makin' me look like a durn fool afore the gent, yisterday—sayin' you knowed him sence he was hatched—ugh!"

There was utter disgust in the tones of the veteran, and as Uncle Fuller encountered that sullen stare, he was shrewd enough to detect danger ahead unless he could shift his present course. He had his own particular reasons for cultivating the acquaintance of the Barnacle, and as these had not been wholly answered, he threw a sop to Cerberus, producing his own flask and shaking it for a moment, then holding it up where the light of the sun could strike through the red liquor.

"On, I ain't a hog, ef I do grunt! I'm a full-growed M. D., an' I kerry a drug-store 'round with me fer to fill out my 'scriptions. Wuss then that, I'm al'ays ready fer to act as taster, so my patients kin be sure I ain't puttin' up no job fer the coffin-man onto 'em! Take a smell, pard, an' ef she don't lift ye clean off'm the ground an' curl your toe-nails up into a double bow-knot, then I'm a false prophet o' Isr'el!"

Aristabulus hesitated, but it was only for an instant. He was so thoroughly accustomed to accepting invitations of the sort, that almost before he was aware of the fact, he held the uncorked flask with bottom pointed toward the sun, while Uncle Fuller watched him with a sickly grin that almost became a spasm at each melodious gurgle!

"That's the wu'st o' gittin' drunk onto the sort o' p'izen these ongodly critters keep to murder thar feller-bein's with by inches at a whack," he muttered, hastily recovering and corking up the flask as soon as the Barnacle lowered it from his lips. "It takes nigh a gallon fer to make a man's hat come anyways near to fittin', the next mornin'."

"Anybody kin see, without hafe tryin', that you're used to heap better lick than a little, one-hoss town like this kin afford to keep," growled Aristabulus, his nose in the air. "What a durned pity you don't pull out whar you kin do better. It'd be turrible hard to worry 'long without ye, but I don't reckon more'n hafe the popylation 'd die o' grief—no, not more'n hafe!"

"Then I'll wait ontel the other hafe kin git thar nose-wipes in good workin' order," grinned the tramp, for this clumsy wit was just suited to his mental caliber. "I never say ajew to a place that they ain't a water-spout an' a cloud-bust fer the highest newspaper to record, an' it takes the hull popylation fer to make a fu'st-class flood. Ho, ole pard; I'll stick to ye as long as they's a swig in your flask or your credit is strong enough to hold up a slate at any one bar in Independence City—with a big S!"

"Oh, you're too mighty 'commodatin', you be!"

"Never a mite, ole pard. It's a gent's bounden duty fer to help a fri'nd empty his bottle, hug his wife, an' keep the oro from getherin' rust into his pockets. An' when duty blazes a trail so plain as she hes this 'ne, you kin bet your bottom dollar your ole Uncle Fuller 'll never stray fur from it!"

"Then, ef I'm your fri'nd, the same law must 'ply to me; so shell out that bottle once more," grinned the Barnacle.

"Won't I?" replied Uncle Fuller, with far more alacrity than his hand displayed in producing the flask. "No man don't hev to grunt when he wants Uncle Fuller to understan' him. Drink hearty, mate! Pity it's sech monstrous pore stuff!"

"I hev tasted better," admitted Aristabulus, lowering the bottle after a vigorous pull at its contents.

"That's the p'int," muttered the tramp, ruefully measuring the liquor remaining, before applying the neck to his own lips. "Ef they wasn't any better 'ithin reach, I wouldn't kear a continental cuss; but I know they is better lick kept in the camp, somewhar—ef a body could on'y find out jest whar!"

"Don't I know it? Didn't I hev a bottle o' the same sort you're dreamin' 'bout, stole from me no later than yist'day? An' devil take the touch did it give my own lips, either!" the Barnacle uttered with sudden heat.

Uncle Fuller made the mistake of trying to swallow and laugh at the same time, the result being a fit of coughing and strangling that came near ending his life then and there. The Barnacle thumped him vigorously on the back, and ere long the Argonaut regained his breath and powers of speech.

"Stole it, did they? Didn't leave you even the cork to smell of? The pesky ongodly critters! They deserve to hev the flask pounded up an' sent to keep the stolen lick comp'ny! Ain't got no idee who done it, I reckon?"

"Not a hooter!" was the prompt reply; but right there the veteran told a lie.

Something in the voice, in the cunning leer of those bleared eyes, aroused his suspicions, and like a flash there came back a memory of the sudden disappearance of the tramp for an hour or more on the preceding day, and that not long before he missed his precious flask.

"Twouldn't be healthy fer him or them ef ye was to run across the critters, I don't reckon? Sorter whoop it up lively, I wouldn't wonder, when you see 'em?" chuckled the bumner, following the lead of the Barnacle still further away from the town.

"Not now," promptly replied Aristabulus. "At the time I was red-hot, fer I'd bin holdin' on to the prime stuff fer to putt the cap sheaf on a big drunk, an' it hit me hard when I wanted it an' it was somewhar else. Jest then I was fightin' mad; but now—waal, it was a good joke, an' the critter as was smart enough to play it so fine onto the old man, deserved all he got, an' more too!"

"Which you'd be on'y too glad fer to give it to him, I ain't afear'd to bet money," laughed the Argonaut.

"Ef he'd take oath he'd never let the joke slip out 'mongst the boys, you bet I would!" was the eager reply. "I'd never hear the last of it, let them once git a grip onto it!"

"Mebbe you'd tell him whar they keeps sech lick, ef he owned up an' 'fessed to playin' the trick onto you?"

"Wouldn't I? Jes' let him try it on an' see!" "Waal," said Uncle Fuller, with a cunning leer, "ef I ever chaine onto the sly critter, I'll tell him what you say."

"No need, durn ye!" cried the Barnacle, his whole demeanor changing as though by magic. "You was the p'izen thief! You stole that bottle, an' now I'm goin' to take pay out o' your hide, ef it costs a lawsuit!"

Moving with all the fire and nimbleness of his vanished youth, the Barnacle confronted the startled tramp, revolver in hand, hammer lifted and muzzle bearing full in his face.

"Good Lawd! don't shoot!" gasped Uncle Fuller, turning as white as dirt and tan would admit. "Don't bloody murder a pore devil jest fer takin' a bottle o' bug-juice! Let up, an' I'll pay ye back double over—'deed I will, now!"

"An' 'deed I mean ye shall," was the significant reply. "But not in p'izen rot-gut. I'm goin' to take the pay out o' your hide. I'm goin' to lick you clean out o' your boots!"

"But you said—"

"I said the critter deserved all he got, an' more too," was the swift interposition, "an' it's the more too I'm goin' to give ye now, bet your boots! I won't shoot ye, fer that'd be a waste o' good powder an' lead on mighty pore game. I need to do penance fer bein' ass enough to let a critter o' your caliber take me in fer a sucker; an' I can't think of a nastier job then lickin' you with bar' han's."

At this the countenance of the tramp perceptibly lightened up, and his voice was steadier as he muttered:

"You don't dast to give a man a fa'r show, an'—"

"Which shows you're a liar as well as a thief. Shell out your weepens—I know you tote a gun an' a knife—an' take keer how you try to play bugs onto the ole man. I've got the drap, an' I'll use it mighty quick ef I see a crooked motion. Strip, honey! It's that or take a blue-pill!"

Uncle Fuller was no fool, and he slowly obeyed. Aristabulus watched him too closely for any effort to turn the tables to be safe, and the tramp stood disarmed before the veteran.

"Now you want to listen to the ole man fer a bit," said the Barnacle, lowering the hammer of his revolver and replacing the weapon in its holster as he set about unbuckling the belt which encircled his waist. "I met you a stranger, an' I treated you white from the word go! I showed you that all the gentlemen wasn't dead. I stuffed you full o' lick, without once tastin' the juice o' your own pocket; but that didn't count with me. I was a citizen, an' we was celebratin' the day o' days an' the city o' cities, to me. But that wasn't enough fer you. You hed to steal—durn it all!" with a sudden outburst of rage; "it makes me too mad fer to talk any longer! Putt up your han's an' keep your face, ef ye kin!"

He aimed a furious blow at the face of the tramp, only to have his arm brushed aside. Swift as thought a puffy fist struck him between the eyes, knocking him back a pace. And then the tramp rained blows upon the astonished Barnacle, hitting him just about where he pleased, driving him back step by step, without giving him time to counter.

Had the wind of the Argonaut equaled his science, Aristabulus would have fared badly; but bad liquor and irregular hours had done their work. He had not strength enough to knock the sturdy miner out, and as his wind began to fail him, his rush lost its terrors. The Barnacle rallied, and in his turn Uncle Fuller began to give ground. Still he was able to guard his face, warding off all blows with a skill that showed Boythorn he could not cope with him thus; and then the miner changed his tactics, leaping in and closing with the tramp.

A momentary struggle for the fall, then Uncle Fuller went down with a force that knocked the breath out of his body. And sitting astride him, Aristabulus fiercely panted:

"Now I've got ye, ye p'izen thief! Own up that you're a fraud o' the fu'st water, or—no ye don't, durn ye!" and his bony fist was driven into the face of his adversary as that worthy made a desperate effort to turn him.

"I kin lick ye in a fa'r fist fight, and you dasn't—"

The bony fist fell upon and closed his mouth.

"Everythin' goes when a gentleman's dealin' with a cussed thief," grinned the Barnacle. "Own up that you're licked. Own up that you're a fraud an' a cheat an' a skin an' a thief an' a coward right from head-waters! Own up, I say, or you'll think they's a airtquake knockin' at the door o' your ugly meat-house! Ye won't? Then—"

Once, twice, the bony fist fell, but as it was lifted for a third blow, Uncle Fuller cried enough! Scarce had the words passed his lips when Aristabulus freed his throat and sprung to his feet, holding out a hand to assist the other to rise.

"That settles it, old pard! Git up, an' we'll take a drink to wash all the bitter out o' our mouths! Git up, man, an' leave all grudges abind ye, like a gentleman. So!"

Accepting the proffered hand, Uncle Fuller slowly arose, a ghastly grin distorting his bruised and bloody countenance.

CHAPTER XI.

UNCLE FULLER BEARDS THE LION.

"WHICH that breaks the slate an' passes the wet sponge o' ferget'ness acrost the runnin' account which they was atwixt you 'nd me, wipin' out the last crooked figger, so fur as the ole man hes any say-so 'bout it," cordially cried the Barnacle, extending his other hand. "Putt it thar, pard! I'd a heap ruther take your paw this-a-way, then to hev it poked into my ole mug, the way you was doin' of it a bit ago!"

Though it was a rather sickly grin with which Uncle Fuller met this frank advance, and though his free hand was busily engaged in drying his battered nose, there was more of honesty in his hand-grip than he had shown for many a

day. It sometimes does a man good to have a sharp fight, even though he gets the worst of the tussle.

"Nur it ain't your Uncle Fuller as ever holds malice a'ter a little turn up o' this sort," he said, and it was probably the honestest remark he had made since first striking Independence City. "A man never knows another on'tel they've hed a skrimmage or two. It was your turn then; mebbe it'll be mine fer to come out on top the next bout."

Aristabulus could afford to be generous, as the victor, and he laughingly shook his head.

"No ye don't, pard. When I want any more fun o' that sort you'll ketch me tacklin' a hair-pin as doesn't kerry a dozen fists hid up each shirt-sleeve! Looked like a hand-factory hed bu'sted loose, an' the bull stock was comin' at me, each one with knuckles fu'st! Ef they'd on'y bin as hard as they was willin', reckon I'd hev to hire a cheap nigger fer to chaw my chuck from this on!"

Uncle Fuller grinned, then shook his head mournfully, as he lowered it to meet a fragment of his shirt, sighing as he gazed at the red stain.

"Time was when it tuck a mighty good man to do that to your Uncle Fuller—'deed it *did*, now! Time was, too, when a man, no matter how big or how clever they made 'em, hed to hev a stone wall to lean up ag'inst ef he didn't want to measure his longitude on the ground when I sent in my keerd! Time was—but it ain't so no longer; the ole man is n. g., an' on'y fit fer to keep grub from moldin'."

"I hope they won't any o' the rest o' my fri'nds hev the impidence to hint as much whar the ole man kin heur 'em," the honest Barnacle said, with a solemn shake of his head. "I ain't no slouch my own self, an' I'm free to own that it was on'y more bone an' solid muskle that let me putt you onto your back. But let it go, pard. Ef you can't hit like you use-to-did, they ain't nothin' to hinder your drinkin' powers. Take a snort, jest to wash the last drop o' bitterness out o' your thrapple; an' here's wishin' it was ekil to the honey-dew you got away with so slick yist'day—drink hearty!"

Uncle Fuller promptly grasped the proffered flask, but while he drank, he kept his bleared eyes riveted on the face of the Barnacle like one expecting him to take to flight before a chance was given to ask an all-important question. In all probability this fear prolonged the fate of at least a portion of the liquor, for Uncle Fuller cut his drink rather short, in order to utter:

"Waal, 'tain't quite as 'ily as that, ef I must say so. You don't disremember the name o' the man who keeps the place whar you got that bottle I reckon, pard, do ye?"

"It's thar ye be, is it?" chuckled the Barnacle, finding no particular difficulty in understanding this rather mixed query. "Waal, le's meander over to the little spring, whar we kin take a decent wash-up, fu'st."

"But you'll tell! You won't play bugs onto your Uncle Fuller? It'd be a blazin' shame, fer lickin' like that's on'y fit fer good jedges like we-uns, an' some durned hog mought buy out the hull supply afore we kin git thar."

"Don't you fret, ole pard. Ef you git hold o' any more o' that bran', it won't cost ye a red cent; money can't tetch it—which is the last word comes over my tongue on'tel I git some o' this dirt an' blood sluiced off'm my ole mug, honey!"

Aristabulus led the way to the spring, and they both took a much needed wash. Both faces were somewhat bruised and battered by that brief skirmish, but that of Uncle Fuller had suffered far the worst. Already his eyes were being draped in mourning. His nose was redder and puffer than ever, while his cheeks also bore the imprint of the veteran's bony knuckles in red and blue.

Aristabulus eyed the tramp critically, with head cocked on one side, for a brief space, then bluntly uttered his idea:

"It don't 'prove you looks so mighty much, but it mak's you smell a powerful sight milder, ole pard. Why don't you do it ofener—say once or twice a year?"

"Too much trouble," muttered Uncle Fuller, in no wise offended at this exceedingly blunt way of speaking. "Then it does double duty—keeps the heat in durin' winter, an' keeps out the sun in summer."

"An' I s'pose when you grow too big fer it, you jest crack the shell an' creep out, locust fashion?" mused the veteran, without the ghost of a smile to hint at a joke.

"Jes' so," as soberly replied the Argonaut. "It's on'y by way o' compliment to the high-toned s'iety in which I circumbulate, that I waste my hard-earned wealth in buyin' these fash'nable dry goods; ef I wasn't sech a darlin' pet 'mongst the ladies, I'd buy a pot o' paint an' tell the tailor good-by fer all time—'deed I jes' would, says your Uncle Fuller!"

"It'd be a powerful sight o' savin', wouldn't it?"

"An' then see how much more oro a man would hev fer to treat his good fri'nds to budge!" enthusiastically added the tramp. "But you didn't mention the name o' the man whar he's the honor o' supplyin' your portable

sideboard, out o' which I borried the only drink fit fer a white gentleman I've hed sence I crossed the Big Muddy!"

"I don't reckon you've fergot him yit," was the reply, with a trace of sarcasm in both face and voice. "It's one o' them old fri'nds you talk about—Frederick Lyon, Esquire."

A sober look chased the eager expectation from the face of the tramp. He cast a swift glance around them. The spring was located at some little distance from the town, and in a spot which rendered eavesdropping almost impossible, but Uncle Fuller crept cautiously around, peering here and there until fully assured that they were the only living beings in the vicinity; then he returned to his former position, saying:

"Look ye here, pard. I ain't so young as I used to was. I ain't got the wit nur the grit that I hed when I was a young man, an' somehow I feels the want of a true an' trusty pardner jest now. I've got a bonanza in my eye—big enough an' rich enough to let two men o' the right sort live in clover all the rest o' thar nat'ral lives. Will you j'ine han's with your Uncle Fuller? Will you come into the game as a equal pardner, call'latin' fer to do your sheer o' the work?"

All traces of levity vanished from the countenance of Aristabulus Boythorn as he listened to this whispered speech. He watched the tramp closely as he spoke, trying to read his inmost thoughts, and it was with a sober tone that he replied:

"Ef your bonanza is sech that a white man kin tetch it 'thout dirtyin' his han's, then I don't mind. But ef it calls fer dirty work—ef it axes a man to do anythin' that'll turn his cheeks red when he thinks o' his dead mother—then I ain't a pard you're lookin' fer."

Uncle Fuller stared at him like one demented. His own conscience was so hardened, his sense of right so distorted, as to make it impossible for him to either understand or appreciate such rugged honesty. Judging the Barnacle by himself, he believed the veteran was simply fighting shy in order to enhance his own value, and without a fear for the result, he spoke again, more to the point:

"A bonanza it is, as you'll see one o' these long-come-shortlies, pard—a bonanza that is running over with gold!"

"Ef it ain't ag'inst what I said afore, le's hear the pat'ic'lars," quietly uttered Aristabulus.

"Now it's *your* time to hev patience an' wait a bit," the tramp chuckled, with vulgar delight on his bruised face. "It is sorter 'nected with the gent you named, though; Mister Frederick Lyon, Esquire—an'-all-the-rest! He's the cocoa-nut we're gwine fer to bu'st wide open fer his milk; an' ef we don't git fat onto it, it'll be our own fault fer not eatin' enough."

"Wind!" pithily ejaculated the Barnacle.

"Wind nothin'!" hotly cried the tramp, his bleared eyes glowing redly. "I tell ye, ole man, I got that high-an'-mighty gentleman right under my thumb! Ef I say to him squeal, out'll come the music in a stream! He on'y breathes 'cause I says he may!"

"It looked like it, yist'day," grinned Aristabulus.

"Never mind the looks; you want to listen to me, or I'll go hunt up another pard what ain't quite so durned pat'icular."

"I'm goin' to pay this gentleman a wisit afore you're a hour older. I'm gwine in head up an' tail over the dasher, but mebbe it won't be quite so easy comin' out."

"Oh, you'll come out easy enough, fur's that part goes."

"They's a resk, in course," was the quiet reply; "but then the pay is big enough to discount all that. Ef the gent ain't too quiek on trigger, it'll all be right, an' I won't lose a tail-feather. Ef he is—it's that I want a pardner fer."

"Look here, ole man; you needn't to bind yourself down to nothin' at the jump-off. All I ax—an' I ax it as a fri'nd—is fer you watch the house fer my comin' out. Ef I don't show up inside a reasonable time, then go tell the citizens whar you see'd me last an' ax them to find out why I stop so long overtime. Will you 'gree to this much?"

The Barnacle nodded, gravely.

"Good enough! Then I make you my heir, 'cordin' to the law o' fri'ndship. Ef anythin' happens to shet off my light, call at the hotel an' give 'em this bit o' paper. It calls fer a package I left thar in the kear o' the landlord. Open that, when you know fer sure I've slipped up the golden stairs—open an' read what you'll find inside. I don't tell you how to act. I leave it all to your own likin' when you come to see the clew that leads to my bonanza."

"Look here," said Aristabulus, placing a hand on the arm of the tramp and speaking with an earnestness which he had not before betrayed. "You say you're goin' to pay a wisit to the mare?"

"Ef he's the man you p'inted out yist'day—ef he's the one who calls hisself Lyon—then I be, fer sure!"

"Then you want to take keer how you does it, honey. Fer I tell you straight out, he's a

mighty bad man when you rub him the wrong way o' the wool—'deed he jest is, now!"

"Mebbe I know him better'n you do, ole man," with a short, hard laugh. "Ef he's the same I kin pritty nigh take my oath he is, I kin lead him 'round the kentry like I would a bull with a ring through its nose!"

"This is a bull that kerries mighty sharp horns, honey!"

"Which'll never gore your Uncle Fuller, be sure o' that. An' even ef the resk is as big as you seem to think, the pay which'll come of a squar' hit, sech as I kin see in my mind's eye a'ready, is wu'th it all. Think of it, ole man! Money'nuff fer to set us up the finest, high-toned saloon in the wide West—to keep on'y the choicest o' stock, with you'nd me takin' turns playin' barkeeper!"

"Which we'd be our own best customers, I reckon," laughed Aristabulus, but with a glitter in his eyes that told how very pleasant the picture appeared to him at first glance.

"Why not? What's to hinder? Ef we wanted, we could hire men to wait on the boys. They wouldn't be no need o' keepin' count o' the drinks, sence he'll pay fer the stock an' take monstrous good keer to keep it up to the top notch, tool Lawd love ye, man, we'd *git fat*, we would!"

Aristabulus slowly shook his head. The first glow of enthusiasm faded before the sober light of afterthought, and he looked dubiously at the enthusiastic bummer.

"Not on wind, ole pard. It may 'gree with you, but it'll never stick to my bones or make me weigh a pound the heavier. I've drunk mighty fine lickin' in my dreams, but I never was any the less dry when I woked up ag'in. No; you kin git fat that way, ef it suits your taste, but the ole man'll stick to hard-tack an' sow-belly fer his'n."

"Keep on a-thinkin' so ef ye feel in the humor, ole pard," chuckled the tramp, rising and brushing the seat of his dilapidated trowsers, such is the strength of habit. "It won't make the feast taste any the less sweet when we come to sock tooth into it. Keep on a-thinkin' so, but while you're doin' of it, s'pose we mog along to'rds the stable this mare o' yours lives into. Mebbe that'll help to show ye your Uncle Fuller ain't playin' hisself fer a durn fool an' idjit!"

"You're in airnest? You're goin' to pay the mare a wisit, fer keeps?" demanded Aristabulus, also rising.

"'Deed I be. Take me fer a wind-bag?"

"All right. You're goin' to the house o' the mare. You're goin' inside, an' at the front do'. You ain't goin' to play any more o' your old fri'nd biz onto me. Ef you try it, durned ef you don't ketch a lickin' sech as t'ether one wasn't a tit on a bog 'longside of—you jest chaw onto that, honey!"

Uncle Fuller showed no signs of either fear or doubt, but unhesitatingly followed the rapid lead of the suspicious Barnacle, who never paused until he neared the vicinity of the house occupied as a residence by Frederick Lyon and his only child, Cleodice, the unfortunate Goddess of Liberty.

"Thar's the shebang whar the mare holds forth," he said, closely watching the tramp, ready to take advantage of the first sign of retreating. "He's likely to be at bum, thanks to the accident which come to his gal. Thar you'll find him."

"Allright. You hain't fergot what I said? You'll watch fer your Uncle Fuller to come out? An' ef he don't come out you'll hev the place s'arched? Mind, I make you my heir. Ef anythin' happens to me, you're to git an' open an' read that paper, an' then act onto what it tells ye as your idee o' justice bids ye. You'll do all this?"

Aristabulus nodded. The earnestness with which the tramp spoke once more shook his suspicions, and he began to ask himself if there might not, after all, be some good foundation for the apparently wild assertions of Uncle Fuller.

"Ef you ain't out in two hours, I'll raise the hull town, an' we'll find what's left o' ye, never you borry trouble, honey," he said, earnestly.

"That's all I ax. I wouldn't rest easy in a grave 'less I could take with me the knowledge that the p'izen critter who sent me thar was agittin' of his just deserts," said the tramp, crossing the street and rapping sharply at the door.

Almost instantly it was silently opened, and Uncle Fuller involuntarily shrunk back, throwing up an arm as though to guard his head, as he recognized the face and figure of Frederick Lyon before him. But he apparently had no cause for fear, for with a gentle smile, the mine-owner politely asked:

"Good-afternoon, my dear sir. Can I do anything for you?"

Uncle Fuller cast a hasty glance over his shoulder which showed him the Barnacle watching them with wide-open eyes and mouth. This lent him the necessary nerve, and he replied:

"I want to see the mare, on pat'icular business."

"I believe I occupy that honorable position," with a low laugh, moving back to permit the

tramp to enter. "Though this is not my office, perhaps it will answer our purpose. Walk in."

Uncle Fuller entered, and followed Frederick Lyon to a comfortably furnished room, where a seat was placed for him.

"I am wholly at your service, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Uncle Fuller, the boys call me," said the tramp, gaining spirit from the mildness of his intended victim. "But it ain't my name that I come to talk about, this time."

"May I ask what it is you wish to talk about, then?"

"About the Courtright murder an' burnin'?"

CHAPTER XII.

AND PROCEEDS TO TWIST ITS TAIL.

WITH a grin that was half-insolent, half-vicious, Uncle Fuller watched the effect of this, his first "hot shot," at the same time holding himself in readiness to beat a hasty retreat or to guard his life against any fierce outburst on the part of the man whom he believed hopelessly cornered. But the result did not equal his expectations.

Instead of turning ghastly pale and cowering before his new-found master, Frederick Lyon showed not the slightest trace of uneasiness, smiling blandly, an inquiring light in his brilliant black eyes. His voice was smooth and even, marked only by the slightest possible amount of curiosity as he said:

"I am wholly at your service, my dear sir, whether you come as one demanding justice or as a fellow-citizen."

"It's justice I'm a'ter—justice with the bark on, an' pure business writ' in every wrinkle!" added Uncle Fuller, taking on fresh courage by the unexpected mildness displayed by the mine-owner. "They's bin bloody murder done, an' nobody fetched to justice yit. The 'sassinator hes kivered his gory han's up with fine kid gloves, and washed the smell o' burnin' flesh away with gold, ontel he holds his head as proud an' high as the mightiest in the land o' liberty! But thar was one—pore, parsecuted, mis'ably bad off when it comes to reckonin' ducats, but kivered over with oncorruptible honesty as with a bufflehide overcoat, who never 'lowed the golden dust to git into his eyes, but who tuck fer his motter, 'Do justice though the skies tumble to thunder.' They was one who let his own chancies to git rich go to blazes, keepin' a eye single onto that glorious motter, feelin' that he would ketch onto his pay ef them cold an' lonesome stiff's on'y was giv' a chance fer to say 'Well done, pard; you saved the p'izen critter, didn't ye?'"

Quietly the mine-owner listened to this bombastic speech of the unsavory bummer, a steady light in his black eyes, something like a smile hovering around his lips. As Uncle Fuller paused to catch his breath, Lyon gravely inquired:

"Why saved, if I may ask? Surely you would not try to cheat justice by shielding such a monstrous villain?"

The tramp tossed his head with a short sniff of contempt at the obtuseness of one who could not understand plain English; but he made no effort to define the doubtful phrase.

"That's the kind of a hairpia I be, honey! I've got this thing down mighty fine, as you'll diskoiver."

He paused abruptly as the mayor made a sudden movement, starting from his seat and instinctively throwing up one arm as a guard, but the anticipated assault did not occur. Instead, Frederick Lyon changed his seat for another which stood in front of a small desk, opening his ink-bottle, placing paper, and speaking briskly while selecting a pen for use.

"If you are ready, Mr. Fuller, I will take down your account of this lamentable affair. Murder and arson, I believe you said?"

"Waal, I ber-durned!"

With puffy hands resting on his knees, with elbows turned out at an awkward angle, his bleared eyes protruding until they seemed to rest on his bruised cheeks, Uncle Fuller stared at the mine-owner as though unable to believe the evidence of his own senses. With ready pen, the mayor waited for his guest to begin, then turned an inquiring gaze toward him.

"I am ready if you are, Mr. Fuller."

Uncle Fuller licked his thick lips, fidgeted a little as though the game was a more difficult one to play than he had fancied. Surely he could not be mistaken in his man? And if this honorable gentleman who was known here in Independence City as Frederick Lyon, its mayor, was not William Courtright, the man branded as a vile assassin, years ago, why had he shown such strong and peculiar agitation when that name was hurled at him?

"I was a pesky idjit fer to give him a hint ontel I was all ready fer to put the twitch onto his nose," the tramp mentally muttered. "It giv' him time fer to lay his plans an' freeze a false-face over the one he showed your Uncle Fuller back onto the slobberation groun's. But it won't work—he ain't goin' fer to cheat your Uncle Fuller out o' his hard-earned bonanza—not much he ain't, now!"

The tramp mustered up his courage and staring defiantly into the calm, business-like countenance of the official, said:

"Mebbe you didn't quite ketch onto what I whispered, a bit ago. It was William Courtright I was talking about."

"William Courtright—as the criminal or the one killed? Pray be a little more explicit, Mr. Fuller! Not that I wish to hurry you, my dear sir," with a bland smile and bow, "but the sooner we get through with the preliminaries and take the trail of this murderous villain—or villains, if more there be—the less likelihood there will be of his escaping."

"Waal, you be a cool one, an' no gittin' 'round that!" the tramp ejaculated, staring dubiously at his intended victim, slowly rubbing his bristling chin with one hand as was his wont when confronted by anything he did not fully understand.

"It is not the man, but the officer of the law who is trying to get at the bottom facts of this case, Mr. Fuller, and so far I have seen no occasion for excitement or anything but coolness in an official capacity. Will you proceed?"

"Durned ef I don't, an' we'll see ef your Uncle Fuller cain't kick over that ice-house o' yourn afore he hes to take his heels to the shop fer repa'rs!" retorted the tramp, with a husky, forced laugh. "As I said afore, they's bin bloody murder done, an' ars'nic piled on top o' that! An' the p'izen critter what done it all was named Bill Courtright. Mebbe you mought happen to hev some 'quaintance with the critter?"

The mayor was rapidly taking notes, his face fully exposed to the keen scrutiny of the tramp; but look as closely as Uncle Fuller might, he could detect no change of countenance, no signs of confusion or fear. If really the criminal he believed, then Frederick Lyon was a man of rare nerve.

"Murder and arson, against one William Courtright. I do not recognize the name, but of course he must be one of our new-comers. Whom did he murder, and when?"

"His brother an' his brother's wife, in '64, down nigh—"

With a sharp, pettish exclamation, Frederick Lyon threw down his pen and gazed half-angrily at the tramp. And his voice was stern as he spoke quickly:

"Nearly a score years ago! What have I to do with it, then? How does it concern me?"

"Jest as nighly as it does me—an' I reckon I wouldn't sell out my sheer o' the case short o' five big fat figgers! But it's a powerful long time atween drinks, an' you'll raaly hev to 'scuse me, boss, ef I take a jump over to the highest whisky-shop, fer 'bout fo' fingers o' nose-paint. 'Nd a prime seegar wouldn't go bad on top o' it, nuther. Go 'long?"

Frederick Lyon took the hint without a smile, rising and placing both liquor and cigars on the little table between them. Then, when Uncle Fuller had fairly moistened his parched coppers and was pulling away at a cigar, the mayor spoke:

"I cannot imagine how I can possibly have an interest in a tragedy that dates back twenty years, but since you are so positive, pray enlighten me. Who was this William Courtright? Whom did he murder? And why?"

Uncle Fuller parched with thirst, and Uncle Fuller with a throat wet by whisky as prime as that which now stood before him in abundance, were two entirely different persons; and there was more of friendliness than of enmity in his dancing eyes as he stared at the mine-owner, nodded, and drank again, then opened his lips to speak:

"It does go back a heap long time, don't it? Younger, then, we both was—younger an' better-lookin' the gals would say. A pesky shame, too! Fer who shouldn't live young ferever, ef not them as 'preciates good whisky?"

"No doubt you are right, Mr. Fuller," politely interposed the mine-owner. "But pardon me if I ask you again to come to the point. When I fancied I might be officially interested in the case you spoke of, I could do no less than listen to all you had to say, giving up my time without reserve; but since it is simply impossible for so old a crime to interest me in the least, even politeness cannot excuse my further neglecting the important business which awaits me. Pray be brief."

"Twas down Denver-way, an' close onto twenty year ago. They was two brothers named Courtright; one was Tom an' the t'other was called Bill. Folks say they didn't git along well together. That Bill was a ugly cuss, take him at his best; that he hed a powerful lip fer whisky, an' besides bein' one o' the cross-grained critters what never gits drunk but what it is a fightin'-drunk, his fingers was so sticky he'd tote off a red-hot stove ef he wasn't watched monstrous class!"

While speaking, Uncle Fuller was closely watching his host, for he chose his words expressly in order to make him break cover; but not even a frown or gleam of the eye betrayed the mine-owner, if indeed he was the long-missing criminal. In cold politeness he bowed when he saw the tramp pause with the evident purpose of awaiting an answer. And with a harder look settling over his bruised face, the tramp emptied another glass, then spoke rapidly:

"They wasn't no love lost 'mong the brothers.

They hed a bone atween 'em at which the dark one—Bill—kep' a-pickin' all the time. An' one day that bone come down to set the brothers still wuss by the ears.

"Of course that bone was a petticut, with a mighty nice little bunch o' woman done up inside of it. She was Tom's wife, but Bill swore she'd orter be his'n ef the game'd bin a squar' one. They was jest on the p'int o' carvin' each other 'bout it when I come onto 'em fer the fust time.

"I was in a streak o' mighty rough luck jest then, an' I didn't think much o' anythin' 'cept gittin' some p'izen fer to kill the rats in my boots. Bill give me some when I axed him fer it, an' I've alays toted the black-eyed critter in a soft corner o' my gizzard ever sence, jest fer that!"

"Yet you accuse him of murder?"

It was the first time Frederick Lyon had suffered a word or look to escape him by which he could possibly be identified by the tramp; and even now Uncle Fuller could not swear that he had seen the one or heard the other, as he gazed into that proud, handsome, cold face.

"It was writ down so, an' how could I help it?" he muttered. "I was shook all to pieces, an' hed a hull menadgery tryin' to crawl up my breeches-laigs. I didn't know what I was doin' hafe the time, ur mebbe I—"

"Are you sure you are not suffering from a slight touch of the same disease just now?" laughed Frederick Lyon. "Not that I wish to give offense, but really, unless that is the case, I do not understand how you can imagine I feel any interest in this old story."

"Mebbe the scales'll fall from afore your eyes as we git a little nearder to the funny p'int," grinned the tramp, pouring out another glass of the generous liquor and swallowing it as so much water.

"Then pray cut it as short as maybe," the mine-owner said, covering a yawn with one hand as he leaned back in his seat, a weary expression creeping over his handsome face.

"Bill Courtright give me a bottle, an' told me to toddle as fast as the law'd allow me; which your Uncle Fuller done. But that one bottle was on'y a flea-bite to one fixed as your Uncle Fuller was, so what comes into his ole noggin' but to go back to the little log shack an' strike Bill fer 'nother o' the same caliber?"

"When he discovered that the brothers had quarreled, the one you call Bill killing the one you called Tom, of course."

"Partly-wise yes, an' partly-wise no," was the deliberate retort. "Don't try to hurry your Uncle Fuller, honey. Ef you git him off his nat'ral gait, he'll stum'le an' whallop aroun' like a duck with one wing broke an' his tail pulled out.

"He got to whar he could see a light in the winder—your Uncle Fuller did. But afore he went any further, he hearn a woman squeal out like she was mortal bad skereed, when—"

"You turned tail and run, of course!"

"Not your Uncle Fuller—no he didn't! Leave the tail part out, an' she kin go, fer run the ole man did—down to the shack, jest in time fer to hear the shootin' an' the woman squealin' fer dear life. Not for long. She stopped, an' then it was so still inside the shack the ole man could hear his own heart thumpin' like a bull-fiddle. But he didn't run. He jest lay low to see what he could see. An' he did—"

"Well?" quietly uttered Frederick Lyon, with a look of mild inquiry, as Uncle Fuller paused with a meaning leer. "You saw something wonderful, no doubt?"

"Never mind whether I did or not!" snapped the tramp, angry at being so repeatedly foiled in his expectations. "When the right time comes, I'll know how to tell what I saw then, an' to take Bible oath onto it, too, don't you forget that!"

"Then you did not tell all at the examination? For, of course, there was an inquest held. Indeed, if I am not mistaken I either heard or read something about the case, at the time. Near Denver, you say?"

The mine-owner spoke rapidly, like one who is seeking to cover up a slip of the tongue, and the faintest possible bit of scarlet marked his cheek as Uncle Fuller grinned and nodded, knowingly. But this lasted only a moment. Then he lit a cigar and carelessly leaning against the table, slowly puffed rings of smoke from his lips, idly watching them ascend toward the ceiling as he waited for the bummer to finish his story.

"Deed they was, though how you come to make sech a slick guess, seein' as the murder tuck place in a lone an' uncivilized part o' the kentry, beats cock-fightin'. But let that go fer a bit. Your Uncle Fuller hain't emptied his bull budget o' fac's yit.

"Waal, they was a scrt o' 'quest over the a'fa'r, fer your Uncle Fuller toted the news to Cherry Crick as fast as his laigs'd kerry him. But while he was makin' tracks, he ketched sight of a red light that come up from the gulch whar the log shack stood, an' it didn't s'prise the ole man much when they wasn't no cabin foun'—on'y a heap o' ashes an' part burned logs, still a-smokin' when we got back thar.

"They was somethin' more diskivered by

them what did the s'archin', though; two some-thin's, to speak by the keerd. They both hed bullet-holes through the top side of 'em; bullet-holes that the doc who 'zamin'd them said was the cause o' thar deaths. What he said an' what your Uncle Fuller could tell 'bout the quarrel he saw an' the soun's he heard that night, was plenty fer the jury to bring in a var-dic' o' guilty onto. Which they did, an' said it was Bill Courtright what done the murder an' the ars'nic a'terwards."

Uncle Fuller paused to catch his breath and taste another glass of whisky—the same brand as that which he so deftly stole from the Barnacle—as well as to take a sly glance into the face of the mine-owner. Nothing rewarded him there. Calm, marked only with a trace of weariness, that face told as little as would an image of marble.

"Aided, no doubt, by what you saw while watching the cabin, of course," he said, carelessly.

"Mebbe yes, mebbe no. Anyways, they was a-plenty fer the jedge to say Bill Courtright was a murderer twicet over; plenty fer to call out a big reward fer him, dead or 'live. They bain't nobody called fer that reward, nur Bill Courtright ain't never come to light sence. Mebbe he changed his name—mebbe he got rich as dirt—mebbe he's livin' this werry day a big toad in the puddle, honored an' respected—mebbe he ain't so dura fur off as folks mought think, this werry minnit!"

As he spoke, Uncle Fuller leaned forward, his eyes aglow, his shaggy head emphasizing with a nod each broken sentence. And Frederick Lyon lowered his eyes until they met the other's.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNCLE FULLER SUPPOSES A CASE.

UNCLE FULLER was not a pleasant object to contemplate, just then, as he leaned across the table, his bloodshot eyes fixed upon the mine-owner with a meaning leer, his bruised face growing redder and more blotched as the generous liquor began to take effect; and apparently Frederick Lyon thought something of this kind, for, after a brief encounter, his eyes lifted again until they were lazily gazing at the ceiling through the widening rings of blue smoke that were softly breathed through his lips.

Uncle Fuller chuckled softly. He felt that the game was fairly in his own hands, and as the man whom he could have taken oath was William Courtright, had taken matters so calmly, he forgot his old fear of violence, and fancied that all that remained to be done was to negotiate the price of his silence.

"It's bin a 'tarnal long time sence the thing was did, an' I suppose the p'izen critter long ago stopped skeerin' at the thoughts o' being pounced onto an' drug back to answer fer the deeds o' that night; but you mebbe know what the good book says 'bout folks tryin' fer to kiver sech doin's from lawful sight forever, don't ye?"

"I have heard the old saw quoted, certainly," replied the mine-owner, stifling a yawn as he spoke; "but I imagine the ancient adage lies quite as often as it speaks the truth. Now take Independence City, for instance. Without flattering the town or ourselves, as citizens, I consider we are as moral and clean a camp as there is in all Colorado—that we have less than the usual percentage of crime and criminals; but for all that, I dare say there are a score of men hiding here under assumed names, on whose shoulders the hand of the law would fall pretty heavily if she only knew them as they really are. And I would hesitate a little before swearing that you, my very dear sir, was not one of those fugitives from justice! Of course, I mean nothing personal; I was only trying to show how precious little one knows of those with whom he is forced to associate in these wild Western mining-camps. At any moment you may be rubbing shoulders with an escaped murderer, while as for robbers and thieves, they are so plentiful that were a man—say Frank Lightfoot, for instance—to clap you on the shoulder this instant, and say—My dear sir, be careful!"

To hide the confusion which he felt must be plainly imprinted on his face, Uncle Fuller hastily lifted a glass of whisky and drained its contents at a single gulp. But the powerful liquor went "the wrong way," choking him until he gasped for breath, turning purple in the face.

His eyebrows arched in mock solicitude, Frederick Lyon poured out another glass and held it before the choking tramp.

"Take a sip of this, my dear sir, and it may clear your throat. I really trust it was nothing I said that so disturbed you? I could never forgive myself should such be the case!"

With a husky curse Uncle Fuller brushed his hand away, for probably the first time in his career as tramp and bumster refusing a free drink. A few moments of hasty gasping and wheezing, then he recovered sufficiently to continue:

"Tain't me we was talkin' 'bout, but you—"

"I beg pardon; William Courtright I believe

you called the escaped assassin," coolly corrected the mine-owner.

Uncle Fuller was rapidly recovering his former confidence, and feeling as he did that he held this man wholly at his mercy, no matter how fiercely he might chafe against the bonds, he cared but little for his own partial exposure.

"Jes' so, boss; Bill Courtright she aire! Now you want to open your two years while your Uncle Fuller s'poses a case."

"Provided my Uncle Fuller makes the case as short as he can without destroying its symmetry," said Lyon, bowing. "Not that I mean to hurry you, my dear sir, but really I never felt much interest in ancient relics. Pray go on."

"S'pose all this happened jest as I bin tellin' of ye. S'pose I kin take my davy that I crep' up to the log shack that night ontel I ketch'd a good glimpse o' the critter what done the murderin' an' the burnin'. S'pose I kep' that part o' the story to my own self when afore the crowner, fer fear some o' the lunkheads mought take a notion your Uncle Fuller was too cluss to the place fer not to 've hed a finger in the pie. S'pose I kep' a snug corner in my mind an' mem'ry fer anythin' that mought turn up to do the ole man a benefit, hevin' a eye out fer a stormy day in the futur'. S'pose the ole man one day found hisself, through no fault o' his own, mind ye, in jail, whar he hed a long talk with a pore critter who was already feelin' of the rope 'round his thrapple. S'pose that convict afore he went out to dance a jig onto nothin', told your Uncle Fuller of a sart'in bonanza what he, meanin' the convict aforesaid, hed bin nursin' up 'ginst he could git a good chainece to dewelop it to his own good. S'pose he tuck a sorter shine to your Uncle Fuller, an' the night afore he hopped the twig, s'pose he giv the clew to his bonanza to the ole man, biddin' him work it fer all it was wu'th."

"All of which may have been highly interesting to you, my dear sir, but it is intolerably stale so far as I am concerned," said Frederick Lyon, changing his position of lazy comfort for one expressing more impatience. "If you have very many more items to suppose, you will confer a great favor by retaining the remainder until I am a little more at leisure; say to-morrow evening."

"Atween now an' which your Uncle Fuller mought easily fall down an' stick a knife to the hilt atween his shoulder-blades," grinned the tramp, with a meaning leer. "Now I've begun, reckon I'd better empty the hull budget."

"For poor patience's sake, make haste, then!"

"Jes' as you say, boss. When he's han'led right, they ain't a more 'commodatin' critter in seventeen States then your Uncle Fuller," nodded the tramp, just moistening his bruised lips with whisky, evidently feeling that he had taken enough until his precious bonanza was fairly located.

"S'pose the secret which that condemned convict told the ole man was that Bill Courtright still lived; that he hed swapped his ole name fer another; that he was rich as mud, livin' like a fightin'-cock 'mongst people who tuck him fer little less then a angel o' light an' uprightness?"

"A very important communication, if it can be depended on as truthful," quietly commented the mine-owner. "Of course you lost no time in putting the officers of justice on the scent, as soon as you were lib—I mean, as soon as your visit to the unfortunate victims of injustice was ended."

"As soon as I got out o' jail," grinned the tramp, with an offensive leer. "You an' the ole man needn't stan' onto ceremony, I don't reckon. But you're mighty right I didn't do no sech fool' thing. I kep' the secret to my own self, an' maniged to work my way up to whar the condemned convict said your Uncle Fuller'd find Bill Courtright-as-was."

"Then he is still at liberty?" asked the mine-owner, his eyes glittering with more undisguised excitement than he had as yet showed since the interview began. "You can point him out, if it was made worth your while?"

"Ef it wasn't made better wu'th it to keep my tongue atween my lips, you jes' bet the ole man could! S'pose your Uncle Fuller maniged to ketch onto the critter afore he knowed they was anythin' bu'sted wide open. S'pose I was to go to him an' say: 'Bill Courtright, you sinner, look here: you've got more 'n the law 'lows one man, while your Uncle Fuller ain't got oro enough fer to set up a lonesome drink to hisself. But ef he ain't got money, he hes got one end o' your secret, which is boun' fer to do one o' two things—it'll either turn into ducats, or it'll turn into a rope with a slip-knot in one end of it, jes' the size o' your thrapple!' S'pose I was to tell the critter this; what do you reckon he'd hev to say then?"

Uncle Fuller ceased speaking and, with the partly-filled glass at his lips, keenly watched the face of the mine-owner.

The lazy, listless expression which had thus far marked the darkly handsome countenance was gone, and in its place came a hard, stern look. But the voice was as smooth and even as of old.

"That depends on the nature of the beast.

If he is a weak fool, no doubt he would yield to your demands, if they were not too unreasonable."

"Oh, I ain't a hog," grinned Uncle Fuller.

"On the contrary, if he is a man of common sense—if he has true grit in his composition—he would probably— How long ago did you say the crime was committed?"

"In '64," muttered Uncle Fuller, taken aback by the sudden transition.

"Twenty years ago, more or less—an age in these days! But you say you know this escaped criminal, this murderer? You are confident you can place your hand upon him when wanted?"

"Jes' as sure as I tetch you this minnit!" chuckled the tramp, placing one grimy paw upon the white hand of the mine-owner as it toyed with the stem of a glass before him.

Frederick Lyon deftly shook the hand off, then wiped his own with a snowy handkerchief, which he crumpled up and tossed out of the open window. Though he did all this without any particular display, Uncle Fuller turned fairly purple with rage and mortification, for even he could not mistake the sentiment which actuated the mine-owner.

"You needn't be so durn pa'ticular," he growled, showing his teeth in an angry grin.

"Ef the tetch o' my paw did leave a little smutch onto your han', it's no more then'll wash off with a bit o' soap an' water; but they's the grip waitin' fer sech as you that won't be got shet of so easy, I tell ye!"

"That of grim death?" smiled the mine-owner. "If irresistible, it at least possesses the merit of being cleanly. But about this William Courtright. You say you know where he is living at the present moment; that you can place your hand upon him at any moment. Am I to infer that he is a resident of this town, under an assumed name?"

"The Good Book never told a bigger truth than that same!"

"You say he is very rich, respected, living a reputable life?" slowly added the mine-owner, his black eyes keenly watching the countenance of his visitor.

"The biggest toad in the puddle!"

"Then you can mean but one man. That is Jeter Burgess?"

Uncle Fuller started half out of his seat with surprise at these wholly unexpected words; but then he rallied.

"Jeter be durned! I don't mean nothin' o' the sort, fer I know him from A to Amperсанд, an' kin prove his title c'lar whenever I like. But never mind mentionin' names jest yit. The critter ain't gwine to git away onseen while you'n' me's talkin' the matter over a bit," grinned the tramp, with a meaning leer that made him look like some half-drunken satyr.

"Not Jeter Burgess! Yet a rich man, living in this place! Really," and Frederick Lyon laughed shortly, "were I at all of a suspicious nature, I would be almost inclined to think you were hinting at me!"

"Tain't Jeter, that's flat; but I won't go no furdur with names," said Uncle Fuller, suddenly growing sober again, leaning across the table and marking his sentences with his stumpy forefinger. "The man is in town. He's rich. He's 'spected by the hull community. He's built up a good name an' repotation. It'd come pesky hard onto him fer it to come out that he was a runaway-murderer which the rope o' the hangman'd bin huntin' these twenty year gone by. Rather than that, I reckon he'd go down putty deep into his weasel-skin fer ducats, don't you kinder reckon, boss?"

"To bribe you to silence, you mean?" asked Lyon, coldly.

"Say to play the wet sponge fer to wipe out the old a'count," improved the tramp, with a grin. "An' mebbe to grease the ole man's fingers so he'd drap the slate on a rock hard enough to break it all to thunder."

"In still plainer speech, you want money as payment for keeping this old crime a secret?"

"Waal, sorter that way, ef you want to come clean out o' the bush. Not that I mean to be too hard onto the pore devil. Your Uncle Fuller ain't a hog, ef he do grunt some. He don't hanker a'ter the hull univarse. But then he's growin' kinder old; slippin' down the shady side o' life, to speak in poetry; an' it's time he was thinkin' 'bout the latter end o' his life-days—to make some kind o' provision fer old age."

"We sot out to s'pose a case; le's kerry it a little furdur. S'pose you was the man I used to know as Bill Courtright. S'pose I come to you an' told you all the ole man could onairth ef he was in the humor fer so doin'. S'pose he was to say he could take his 'davy he seed' you that night when the two persons was killed an' ars'nicked. S'pose he wanted money an' comfort more'n he keered fer jestic an' sich-like. What would you say to all that? Jist s'posin', of course."

"Always supposing—possibly my first question would be how much money you demanded as the price of silence."

"Not so durn much, nur yit all into a heap," was the hasty reply. "I couldn't keep my grip onto a big pile, ef I was to git it in a lump. Jest set the ole man up in a tony saloon—stock

it with a lot o' sech whisky as *them* fer private drinkin'—an' the commoner stuff fer customers; give your Uncle Fuller a written paper bindin' yourself to keep the shebang runnin' ontel the ole man peters out fer good; an' he won't ax you nothin' more fer holdin' of his tongue."

"You are sure this is all you would demand?"

"Sart'in sure! Good Lord, boss! fix it jes' so, an' your Uncle Fuller'd be nigher heaven then he ever hoped to git in this world—'deed he jes' would, honey!" enthusiastically cried the tramp, licking his lips, his eyes all aglow.

"Your demands are modest enough, and were I the runaway murderer, I would most assuredly accept them without haggling for a moment," gravely uttered the mine-owner, rising from his chair and deliberately putting on a pair of dark kid gloves.

Uncle Fuller stared at the speaker, his lower jaw dropping, his eyes protruding, the delightful castle in the air beginning to topple and drop to pieces. Could it be that his cornered prey was about to make a fight for escape?

"You have admitted giving false testimony before the coroner's jury in this case. You own to knowing where the real assassin is concealed, under a fictitious name, and have betrayed your willingness to compound a dastardly crime for the sake of a consideration in money or goods. Were it left to you, you would still further cheat justice of her rights; but fortunately you have exposed your hand to an honest man, and unless you aid in the capture of this murderer, you shall suffer the penalty due your crime."

As he spoke, Frederick Lyon passed around the table and dropped one gloved hand heavily upon the shoulder of the trembling, bewildered rascal, shaking him as though to awaken him to a full sense of the words he so sternly uttered:

"I will give you just one week in which to point out them an' you declare to be William Courtright, the escaped assassin. At the end of that period, if the greater criminal is not in the hands of the law, I will denounce you as an accessory to the fact, if not an actual participant in the double murder. And every dollar I possess—every atom of influence I can command—shall be employed to bring you to punishment!"

"And now for your insult to me personally. You hinted, if you did not ask for a bribe in so many words. For insulting me thus, I will treat you as I would any other cowardly black-mailer. Get up, you contemptible cur!"

There was nothing of lassitude in the look or actions of the mine-owner now. His hands closed on the tramp with the power and tenacity of steel springs, lifting him bodily from his seat, running him helplessly from the room, through the entry and to the outer door. Holding him with a vise-like grip by the neck, Frederick Lyon opened the door with his free hand, then kicked Uncle Fuller half-way across the street.

And staring curiously, the Barnacle saw the action.

CHAPTER XIV.

MAN'S INGRATITUDE TO MAN.

AND as he watched this acrobatic performance on the part of this recently made partner of his, Aristabulus Boythorn once more changed his opinion of the dilapidated-looking Argonaut.

Though not ordinarily a fickle man, the Barnacle had appeared in that *role* ever since Uncle Fuller put in an appearance at Independence City. Regarded by the veteran in the first place as a degraded tramp, then elevated to the position of broken-down gentleman, from his wonderful capacity for holding bad whisky. From this to that of a fraud, when cowed by the steady gaze of Frank Lightfoot. Still lower when the theft of the bottle was discovered. Raised once more to his own level as the Barnacle listened to the fluent description of that wonderful bonanza. And as Aristabulus watched the bold air with which Uncle Fuller rapped at the mayor's door—as he saw how politely Frederick Lyon received the disreputable-looking caller—as the door closed behind them and the minutes rapidly rolled up into an hour, his respect and good opinion grew in the same proportion, until the worthy Barnacle felt like taking off his hat and bowing respectfully to the honorable genius in disguise.

Only to have the newly-raised idol shattered forever as the door opened and Uncle Fuller flew across the street under the powerful impulse lent him by the boot and muscular leg of the mine-owner.

Uncle Fuller struck on his feet, bounced forward as though made of rubber, tripping and falling to his hands and knees, then shuffling ahead rapidly in the endeavor to save himself from plowing up the hard soil with his face. The instant his mad career was arrested, a bowl of mingled pain and rage escaped his lips. He turned toward the house, rubbing the worst afflicted spot with one hand, while the other clinched tightly and was shaken savagely, as he snarled:

"You dassen't do it ag'in! I'll git even with

ye fer this, durn an' double-durn ye! An' me a ole man!"

His voice broke and there were tears of pain and shame in the bleared eyes which he turned upon the Barnacle.

"Did ye see it, pard? Did ye see how the dirty dog treated me? An' me a ole, broken-down man, only fit fer the grave."

"There's plenty o' young blood into ye yit," laughed the Barnacle, taking no notice of the trembling hand which the Argonaut extended toward him. "Plenty o' young blood an' heaps o' life, or you'd never play leap-frog like *that*! The good land o' liberty, man! ef I could on'y 'a' tuck your pictur' when you was cuttin' up them didoes, they ain't a young an' rich an' lively grass widder in seventeen States what wouldn't give hafe her fortin' fer the fu'st chaine at ye—haw! haw! Go 'way circurious actors! You hain't got no aige onto *him*! Of all the high-kickin' an' top-lofty tumblin' show-ups, them was the outdo'in'est I ever seed!"

Uncle Fuller grinned a most ghastly grin, dividing a savage glare between the Barnacle and the house wherein his enemy dwelt. If hatred could have slain, neither of the twain would have drawn another breath of life. But just then Uncle Fuller needed aid and consolation, and so he smothered his anger at the blunt humor of the veteran as best he could, saying in husky tones:

"Pizen funny fer them that jest looked on, I don't doubt; but them laugh best what laughs last. He's got to pay big fer his little fun, an' with you to bolp the ole man, I reckon your Uncle Fuller kin fetch his nose down to the grindstone an' hold it thar ontel he bleeds gold at every pore! What—"

The Barnacle drew back, placing his hands behind him, his gray head shaking slowly as he eyed the refused hand.

"Not any more in mine, thankee! Ef you're too good fer the mare to 'sociate with in his own house, you're too good fer the likes o' me. The partnership atween us two is 'solved this day, an' ef anybody axes you what brung it about, jest tell 'em it was too big a dose o' boot-leather, 'scribed an' 'ministered by Doctor Mare, Ex-quire. Good-day! When you see me comin', please to pass over to the other side o' the street."

This was the sharpest, unkindest cut of all; and there was something almost like tears in the bleared eyes of the broken-down bummer as he watched the still erect and powerful form of the Barnacle moving away. But only for a brief space; then his evil nature showed itself in the furtive shaking of a clinched fist, in the muttered threat:

"Go your way, you bull-headed dog! I'll git even with ye fer this, ef it takes ten year!"

Slowly, painfully, Uncle Fuller limped away from the scene of his utter discomfiture, his brain in a whirl, trying vainly to shape some plan by which he might gain his long-cherished ends and at the same time avenge his injuries. And it was just as he was on the point of giving over in despair when, in turning a corner, he almost ran into Frank Lightfoot. He instinctively recoiled, and the Miner Detective was passing on without noticing him, when Uncle Fuller acted on the impulse of the moment, shambling forward and catching the young man by the sleeve, huskily muttering:

"I know whar the pizen 'sassinator lives, an' kin putt your han' onto him inside the hour!"

Lightfoot recoiled a pace, his bronzed face turning a shade lighter, a curious glow in his big blue eyes. At the same time he struck that grimy paw from his arm. Uncle Fuller dodged back like one expecting a blow, and his tone was almost a snarl as he uttered:

"All right, ef ye don't want it. I kin give the job to some other gent jes' as well."

"What job? What assassin do you mean?" demanded Frank.

"The Courtright mess—you know," grinned Uncle Fuller, holding himself in readiness to continue the interview or to flee in hot haste, as circumstances might render prudent.

Still Frank Lightfoot hesitated, naturally loth to have any confidential dealings with one whom he knew to be so utterly worthless as to be without a single redeeming quality. Feeling sure himself that the man who now called himself Jeter Burgess was in reality the escaped murderer whom his solemn vow bound him to hunt down to death on the gallows, he had no other thought than that Uncle Fuller alluded to him. For reasons which will be made clearer as we progress, Frank Lightfoot was exceedingly loth to have the affair made common property, and as the surest safeguard against this, he resolved to hear the informer's story in private.

"If you are sure you have anything to say that is worth my listening to, come with me to my room," he said, coldly, turning on his heel, one hand closing on the arm of the tramp.

Uncle Fuller involuntarily shrunk back as he felt that firm grasp, almost sorry that he had spoken; but it was too late to think of retreating. From past experience, he knew that Frank Lightfoot was not one to permit such trifling.

Brief as was their passage to the hotel in

which the Miner Detective had rooms, it was long enough for Uncle Fuller to decide on his course of action. And when Lightfoot motioned him to a chair beside the table, he promptly opened his batteries, his voice a subdued whine, his bruised countenance assuming its most doleful expression.

"It's bin a heap o' work an' a powerful lot o' 'spense to your Uncle Fuller, runnin' the pizen critter to earth, boss! Nigh twenty years on the trail—think o' *that*! An' now the eend draws nigh, it finds the ole man broken down, without a dollar to cross hisself with, an' too weak in body fer to do the 'restin' part his own self. It comes mighty hard, boss!"

Frank Lightfoot flung out one hand with a gesture of contemptuous aversion as he made reply, not to the words but to the meaning of his unsavory visitor.

"The blood-money shall be yours, if your information leads to the arrest of the criminal I am after, never fear for that. As for the twenty years, how many of those were spent in the employ of the State?"

Uncle Fuller shrunk a little more into himself, but there was a foxy light in his bleared eyes and a sickly smile on his bruised face as he whined forth his reply:

"They was sot down to your credit, anyway, boss."

"A portion of them, you mean," was the cold reply. "Bah! you graceless cur! do you think I haven't learned your record from start to finish? That you can name a single year of your life that I cannot tell where and how it was spent? If so, you are 'way off. I was set to work at your record in days gone by, and I never take up a thing without carrying it to the very end. If you keep this fact in mind, perhaps it will save you some breath if not broken bones."

"I'm a ole man—"

"And doubly aged in crime and deviltry of the meanest description. Tell me something I don't know."

This was not a promising opening for Uncle Fuller, and he felt that his precious, long-gloated-over bonanza was rapidly fading away into nothingness. But at the same time he realized that it was neck or nothing with him now; since he had betrayed his secret to this young bloodhound, he could only go on and make a clean breast of it, trusting to his honor and generosity for his reward.

"Mebbe it's more'n the ole man kin do, but he'll try," he uttered, shifting uneasily on his seat and licking his parched lips. "You've hearn tell o' the Courtright murder, down Denver-way, which tuk place in the year '64, in course?"

"Why of course?" coldly demanded the detective.

"Waal, I thought—I kinder reckoned—"

"That I was following that old trail?" with an uplifting of the eyebrows as in surprise. "You don't mean to say that you have struck the scent of that criminal?"

"'Deed I jest does, boss!" grinned the tramp, his natural impudence wholly restored. "I kin putt my two paws onto Bill Courtright, the critter as murdered an' then ars'nicked his own born brother an' wife, any minit I see fit to do it!"

"Then he is living here in Independence City?"

"Waal, mebbe I stretched it jest a little bit, when I said any minit," slowly replied the tramp, already racking his cunning brain for a trick by which he might satisfy the detective, yet still keep the long-cherished bonanza to himself. "I didn't mean fer to say quite so much as them, but—"

"Since you have started by speaking the truth, suppose you keep on in the same trail?" sharply uttered the detective. "With the first lie you dare to tell me, I'll remember the past, and clap the bracelets on you as the first step to sending you back to serve out the rest of your sentence."

"But you said you—"

"Steady, my man! As yet I only know you as Uncle Fuller, a broken down gentleman who has seen better days; don't try to freshen my memory too soon, if you value your liberty."

Again the tramp was cast into the depths, from the bottom of which came the husky, whining tones:

"What shell a pore critter do? What you want him to say? Durned ef your Uncle Fuller ain't a most sorry he was ever bornded into sech a pizen cruel worl!—'deed he is, now!"

"What do I want?" coldly repeated the detective, his magnetic gaze fixed upon the uneasy tramp. "To make you understand your proper place and show you the worse than folly of trying to rise above it while you are dealing with me. I know you as you are: a cowardly, treacherous, canting cur. Act out your real nature, and don't try to pass yourself off for anything better. When you show that you have fairly learned this lesson, I will suffer you to tell your story."

Uncle Fuller showed his teeth, but it was with the helpless fear of a captured rabbit, rather than the dangerous despair of a cornered wolf. Judging others by himself, he believed that the detective intended to rob him of his coveted re-

ward, after extorting the truth from him; but he was so wholly at the mercy of Lightfoot that he durst not rebel.

"You say you have run down William Courtright, the murderer for whom, twenty years ago or so, there was a large reward offered. Are you positive you have made no mistake?" the Miner Detective resumed, after a brief silence.

Uncle Fuller looked into his face, as though hoping to read there the answer which would give the best satisfaction to the being whom of all others on earth he the most feared; but in vain. The countenance of a sphinx could not have been more inscrutable.

"I kin take my solemn Bible 'davy to him," he muttered, in dogged desperation.

"Did you ever see the man, or are you trusting solely to your memory of the description published at the time, or of his pictures as published for the purpose of identification?"

"I see'd him then—see'd him not six hours afore the murder was done. I was the man as kerried the news to Cherry Crick an' brung back the crowd as sot in the crowner's 'quest over the remains. I toted a pictur' o' him fer years afore I lost it, an' ef I was a paintin' man, I could make another from mem'ry that you couldn't tell from the 'riginal."

"Be careful—twenty years is a long time."

"An' so's the mem'ry o' your Uncle Fuller," was the dogged reply. "I knowed the p'izen critter as soon's I sot my two eyes onto him, when I come here 'cordin' to the d'rections as Sheeny Jake give me afore he hopped the twig. I stan' ready to sw'ar out a infirmation, ef you want it afore takin' the critter, an' ef it don't turn out jest as I say, you kin take the pay for your trouble out o' the old man's hide."

"He is living here in town, then? Well off, or poor?"

"Rich enough to make the 'pendent fortins of a dozen pore critters like your Uncle Fuller, and then not miss the ducats out o' his pile!" spitefully snapped the tramp.

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth ere he realized the mistake he had made. He saw a cold smile curled the lips of the Miner Detective, and fairly shook with sullen fear as he listened to the measured speech:

"Rich, yet a criminal to whom discovery and arrest means death on the gallows! Rich—able to pay a fortune for liberty—and you his discoverer? Really, Uncle Fuller, I wonder that you did not go to the rich man and offer to relieve him of a portion of his wealth!"

The lips of the tramp parted to utter a hasty denial, but with that steady, cold gaze resting upon his face, he dared not speak the words. Sullenly, viciously, he growled:

"Tain't no use tryin' to throw dust into your eyes. I did do jest that. I went to him, sayin' I'd hold my clapper till the crack o' doom, ef he'd make a fa'r settlement."

"Which of course he did? Yet you are now offering to sell him to justice!"

"You know he didn't do nothin' o' the sort," sourly. "He kicked me out o' the house like a durned dog, he did!"

"And served you perfectly right, too!" exclaimed the Miner Detective, with sudden heat, his eyes flashing, the veins beginning to swell on his temples. "A cur like you face a gentleman of truth and honor with such a base proposal! I only wonder he left a whole bone in your vile carcass!"

"He didn't dast—he knowed I held him by the—"

"Enough of that idle boasting and lying, you cur!" grated the detective, tapping the tramp on his shoulder. "You want to go a little slow. You want to keep your tongue between your teeth after this. If you dare to utter so much as a hint concerning this ridiculous idea of yours, up you go, sure!"

Then rage conquered fear, and the tramp snarled savagely:

"I knowed it! You want to cheat me out o' my jest dues! You've see'd the critter, an' he's bought you up, body an'—"

Uncle Fuller never finished that sentence. A resistless grip was fastened upon him. He was raised from the floor and carried across to the open window. One fierce shake, such as a Newfoundland dog might give an impudent terrier, then he was dropped through the opening, to plunge down to the ground, a wild yell of terror escaping his lips and attracting the attention of the men at work in the stable-yard, hard by.

CHAPTER XV.

FRANK LIGHTFOOT DOES BATTLE WITH HIMSELF.

THE room which Frank Lightfoot occupied was in the second story, its one window looking out upon a stable-yard, with a prospect far more matter-of-fact and odoriferous than romantic. Almost directly beneath the window a large pile of manure had been permitted to collect, and it was fairly upon this that Uncle Fuller dropped, the shock cutting short his wild yells of terror. He sunk to his knees in the offal, then rolled headlong down its sloping side, plunging into a shallow puddle of drainings, floundering from thence to dry land, where he

lay groaning and lamenting like one not long for this vile cruel world.

His screams for help alarmed the laborers at the stables and more than one of them were witnesses of his rapid descent from the window. Almost before the tramp rolled into the pond to take anything but a scented and perfumed bath, these witnesses were on the spot, eager to see all there was to be seen.

"Ef I'm killed, it's him that done it!" groaned Uncle Fuller, as a strong hand caught and dragged him out of the filth. "With my dyin' breath I say it—Frank Lightfoot done the bloody deed! 'Rest him—hang him—roast him, an' your Uncle Fuller 'll die happy!"

Instinctively all eyes were turned toward the window through which the tramp had passed, and seeing that an explanation would quickly be demanded if it were not volunteered, the Miner Detective thrust his head out of the window.

"Gentlemen, the poor devil don't know what he is saying when he accuses me of throwing him out of the window. When I allow myself to go to that extreme, be sure I'll pick a harder spot for my antagonist to light on than that!"

There was a little burst of laughter from the stablemen at this remark, and Uncle Fuller groaned with redoubled fervor, partly because he really imagined himself worse hurt than actually was the case, partly because he knew that while men laughed, they never lynched. It was a frail hope, but if the honest citizens could be made believe that he was the victim of a foul attempt at murder, their just indignation might avenge him before cool reason demanded a closer investigation.

"He wanted to kill me 'cause I knowed too much!" he muttered buskily, clear enough for those around him to understand, but so low that his meaning could only be guessed at by the man at the window above. "I'm dyin' a murdered man—an' me old enough fer to be his gran'father—oh-ah!"

The laughter ceased abruptly, and some of the faces turned toward the window where Frank Lightfoot stood were growing dark, and menacing, when the young man cried out clearly:

"The poor devil has been drinking until his boots are running over with snakes and he don't know what he is saying or doing. To escape them, he jumped out of the window. Sober him off, and you'll see that I am giving it to you straight as a string, gentlemen. Take him and give him a good bath—it won't hurt him any, from the smell he is kicking up! And then join him in drinking the good health of yours truly!"

As he uttered these words, Frank Lightfoot tossed a gold coin through the window. It was caught by one of the stablemen, and when its denomination was seen, an enthusiastic cheer went up for the donor.

"Durned ef the critter don't stan' in need o' somethin' o' the sort!" laughed one of the men.

"Ketch holt an' le's do the job up in style, mates! Hold your nose with one han' an' freeze onto the animile with t'other—hoop-la!"

Frank Lightfoot smiled grimly as he watched the proceedings. Despite his frantic struggles and howling curses, the vigor of which told plainly enough that Uncle Fuller had suffered slight damage in his speedy descent, the tramp was dragged across the yard to the pump. Two men held him beneath the spout, while their comrades took turns in working the handle, cheered on in their labor of humanity by the yells and cheers of the steadily growing crowd attracted by those doleful cries. Uncle Fuller fought and struggled as well as he was able, but all in vain his efforts. He was fated to be more thoroughly washed that day than he had ever been in his life since the days of babyhood were left behind him!

The Landlord and one or two others rushed up to the room at the first alarm, and Frank Lightfoot quietly gave them an explanation which proved entirely satisfactory.

"The fellow imposed upon me with a cock and bull story, and I brought him up here to investigate his claims. They not only proved without the slightest foundation in fact, but the rascal had the impudence to try to bulldoze me, and I dropped him out of the window as the quickest method of getting rid of him."

"He kinder groans like he was bad hurt," cautiously ventured the Landlord.

"If he is, I am responsible. If he or any other person wishes to interview me, show them up, please. Good day, gents!"

He bowed them to the door, closed and locked it, then returned to the window just in time to turn the tide in his favor and doom the unlucky tramp to the pump-cure. He watched this grimly humorous scene for a few moments, then closed the window and strode rapidly, silently back and forth across the chamber, his brows contracted, his blue eyes glowing redly, his teeth set so firmly as to make his strong jaws seem even more resolute and squarer than ordinary.

Now and then he would pause for a few moments, his eyes staring at vacancy, his firm features relaxing. At such times words and names passed his lips in broken and disconnect-

ed sentences. Little as could have been made of these by an eavesdropper, they served as a sort of escape valve, and little by little the strongly agitated man grew calmer and more like his usual self.

In one of his turns across the room, a wild, prolonged cheer reached his ears, and recalled to the present he looked out through the window, with which he was then in close contact. He saw the stablemen release Uncle Fuller, having given him bath enough for the present. He saw the half-drowned rascal shamble away, leaving a wet trail behind him, seemingly thinking only of how he could get clear of Independence City and the little mob of hooting, cheering, laughing, jeering men and children who formed his escort—not of honor, however!

"They've let him off with life," the Miner Detective muttered, unconsciously uttering his thoughts aloud. "He looks humble enough now, but there's too much poison in his composition for him to wait long before striking back. He dare not assail me directly, but he'll try to stab me through William Courtright. Ha!" he exclaimed, catching his breath and turning a shade paler as his eyes glittered like balls of living fire. "He said he had been to see him—that he offered him immunity for money! What if William Courtright has taken the alarm and fled?"

Slowly Frank Lightfoot turned away from the window and dropped into a chair beside the table. On this he rested his elbows, his chin supported by his clinched hands, his gaze fastened on vacancy. His brain was busy, the thoughts that chased each other so rapidly through his mind causing the veins to swell and stand out on his temples until it seemed as though they must burst from the pressure to which they were subjected.

It will be remembered that Uncle Fuller had not mentioned the name of Frederick Lyon once during that interview. As will be shown, Frank Lightfoot felt so perfectly convinced that Jeter Burgess was the escaped assassin. William Courtright, that he took it for granted the tramp alluded to him.

By a curious chain of circumstances, it became the life-work of this young man to hunt down and bring to justice the man who soiled his hands with the blood of his own brother and his brother's wife, twenty years ago. By facts and proofs which he deemed irrefragable, Frank Lightfoot came to Independence City convinced that he would find the criminal in Jeter Burgess, which, possibly, was the reason why his suspicions never once turned toward Frederick Lyon, though, as seen, the resemblance between the partners in the Liberty mine was strong.

"If he has fled, I must follow him!" muttered the Miner Detective, unwittingly giving audible utterance to his thoughts. "And yet—I would give my good right arm if it was anybody but Jeter Burgess—but her father!"

The secret was out now. It was not love for Jeter Burgess that held the hand of the avenger back, but love for his fair child, Mora. Though of recent growth—for never a word had the twain exchanged one month prior to that eventful day of rejoicing—the passion felt by the young detective was none the less intense and absorbing. It had caused him to loll back the hand which had sworn to drag the murderer to the gallows. It made him hesitate even yet, while he fancied the assassin was fleeing from justice, warned by Uncle Fuller.

"If I could—if he was only alive to take back that terrible oath! What is it to me, those dead people? Why should I give over every hope—why should I bury my happiness forever in their graves? And hers, too! If I could only think it—if I could only be certain that the little darling loves me in return—bah!" with a hard, forced laugh, lifting his head and tossing back the long hair from his eyes.

He rose to his feet and passed over to a strong, carefully locked valise. Opening this, he took out a clasped note-book, opening it as he returned to the table. From the book he took several pictures, one of which he selected and gazed at it steadily, his eyes burning redly, his face hard-set and frowning.

It was the face of a young man, handsome and even refined in its contour, though the style of dress seemed odd to the eyes which belonged to the present generation of this fast-living country.

Though so much younger in appearance, Frank Lightfoot could detect a strong resemblance between it and the face of Jeter Burgess as he recalled it to mind. And with something that sounded curiously like a groan, he dropped the card.

"There can be no mistake. Jeter Burgess is William Courtright, and I have solemnly vowed to bring him to the justice which he has evaded these twenty years. I took the oath willingly, my hand on the heart of the dead, his voice still ringing in my ears. I took up the task where Calvin Apperley resigned it for the grave—took it up as a sacred duty which I owed to him. I have followed the blind lead until it became clear, until I could place my hand on the shoulder of the merciless wretch who cruelly butchered two loving relatives, and forever

darkened the life of still another being. All this have I done, yet now that the end is fairly before me, I hesitate—I forget the vow, the dying words of the one who—

The sentence was ended by a fiercely muttered oath, and his tightly clinched fist came down upon the picture of William Courtright with a force that dented both it and the hard wood of the table top beneath it. And that blow caused the other pictures to jump and flutter until one of them moved over and hid the handsome face of the murderer from view.

Frank Lightfoot saw this, and his face gradually lost its fierce expression as he gazed steadily down at that beautiful face. It represented a young woman of far more than ordinary loveliness, arch, smiling, bewitching, forcibly reminding him of some one whom he knew—whom he had recently seen—ha!

With trembling fingers Frank Lightfoot picked up the picture and held it in a more favorable light. It was long since he had looked at it closely as now, for as a detective, he naturally felt more interest in the sinner than the one sinned against; for this was the picture of the ill-fated wife of Thomas Courtright.

But now, as he gazed, his heart throbbed unusually fast and hard, his breath came in short, quick gasps; for he felt as though he was looking at the pictured face of Mora Burgess! Only for the different manner of wearing the hair, and peculiarity of the garments, he could have taken oath that Mora Burgess had sat for that picture!

"Can it—if it only could!" he muttered, his eyes glowing, his face lighting up wonderfully as the idea for the first time occurred to him. "There was a child—a girl—and if still living it would be about her age! Then the strong resemblance! Greater far than is common between mother and daughter—so close that I could almost swear it was meant for none other than my darling! If it should be—an uncle is not like a father; and an uncle whose hands are dyed red with the blood of her real father and mother!"

He dropped the picture and rose to his feet, striding rapidly to and fro, too deeply agitated to remain still. The motion served to steady his whirling brain, but with returning reason, it brought doubt and fears.

If it was as he had madly hoped—if Mora Burgess was in reality the child of Thomas and Edna Courtright; if William Courtright was indeed their assassin, and if Jeter Burgess was that William Courtright—would he care to have the child of his victims constantly with him? Would he not rather flee from such an eloquent reminder of his frightful crime, instead of lavishing such love upon it?

"I'm an idiot for even suffering such an idea to enter my head!" he muttered, with a short, hard laugh as he picked the pictures up and returned them to the book, placing that in his breast-pocket. "Like a drowning man, I am catching at the frailest straw that floats past me. I am letting a silly fancy for a fair face drive away thoughts of duty—a duty I owe to the dead—a duty I will perform, let the consequence be what it may!" he uttered, his voice ringing out so clear and firmly as to startle himself.

But if his tongue was stilled, his brain was none the less busy. And mentally he continued:

"I must lose no more time. That dirty scoundrel will not lose much time in warning the criminal that I am on his track, and that will give me another chase. If he has not already taken the alarm, I'll have him neck and heels before midnight!"

Decidedly as he resolved, all the time Frank Lightfoot felt conscious of a resolve to give the supposed criminal every opportunity to clear his skirts of that double murder before actually arresting him. Not for his own sake, though the mine-owner had treated the detective kindly, courteously, despite the apparent difference in their position in life; but because of his powerful love for Jeter Burgess's daughter.

Satisfying himself that his weapons were in working order, carefully hidden from casual view, though handy in case of need, Frank Lightfoot put on his hat and left his room. He paused while passing through the bar-room long enough to answer a few questions concerning the unlucky bumper, then left the hotel, moving slowly toward the house in which dwelt Jeter Burgess.

This was somewhat removed from the denser—if such a term may be used to describe what at best was but a scattered collection of houses and shanties—portion of the town. Like his partner, Frederick Lyon, Jeter Burgess had built "in the suburbs," and one could pass from one building to the other in a direct line, without entering the town at all.

His brain busied with thought, Frank Lightfoot moved slowly along, almost unconscious of his surroundings, studying the best manner of opening his budget when once in the presence of Jeter Burgess; of how to get a private interview without alarming Mora; how to solve his new-born suspicions without too plainly betraying his own hand.

Thus busied, he failed to notice the approach of a young lady whose face was already glow-

ing with more than ordinary emotion as her bright eyes took in his handsome face, his stalwart figure. Not until an embarrassed little laugh caught his ear did Frank Lightfoot return to himself, and then started back with a short cry as he found himself almost in contact with Mora Burgess.

Blushing, smiling, confused by his action, she murmured:

"Really, Mr. Lightfoot, did you take me for a ghost? Am I so terrible an object as to frighten my best friends?"

CHAPTER XVI.

A FAIR STUMBLING BLOCK IN DUTY'S PATH.

It was plain enough to be seen that Miss Mora Burgess was but little more at her ease than the man who for a single moment stared at her as he might at a vision fresh from the clouds. Her blushing cheeks, her shy glances, her nervous manner, to say nothing of the slightly-strained voice with which she uttered her greeting, all went to prove this. Frank Lightfoot was not so blind but what he saw this, and while it made his heart leap for very joy, it restored his outward composure.

Off came his hat while his other hand quickly clasped the timidly-extended member with a respectful warmth that served to at once place the maiden at her ease.

"Your pardon, Miss Burgess," he said, half-laughing, half-gravely. "I was so deep buried in the grave of the past that when aroused by your voice, I might well be pardoned for taking you for—not a ghost, but some celestial vision. It required a second glance to bring me back from heaven."

Mora laughed faintly, her disturbed composure by no means wholly regained, a little frightened by the burning light which she saw in those big blue eyes.

"And yet, if I may say so," she murmured, scarce conscious of what she really uttered, "your face looked dreadfully cloudy for one whose thoughts were dwelling in the region of pure light. I almost expected to hear thunder in your tones and see the lightning flash from your eyes for my temerity in addressing you—yet I could not suffer you to pass without trying to thank you for all you did for me last night!"

If the first words were rather artificial and forced, the concluding portion was sincere and earnest enough to satisfy the most exacting. There was naught of affectation in the tone or face of the young woman as she caught the hands of the Miner Detective between both of hers, pressing them warmly, then suddenly bowing her head until her warm lips touched them.

A faint exclamation escaped her as she felt them grow cold as ice in her hands before they were swiftly withdrawn, and she glanced up into the face of their owner. Frank Lightfoot was pale as death, his countenance painfully distorted, while his eyes were blazing with a light that startled while it sent a strange thrill through her veins.

"You are ill?" she hastily uttered. "Let me call for—"

Once more the sound of her voice proved sufficient to restore the Miner Detective to his wonted composure, at least in outward seeming. His tones were steady as he replied:

"Not ill—only startled by seeing how seriously you seem to regard the slight service I was, happily, enabled to render you last evening, Miss Burgess."

"Slight!" echoed the maiden, her face flushing, her voice ringing with mingled reproach and gratitude. "Do you call it slight, when you preserved me from a frightful death? When you saved me twice over—once from that hideous wretch who was bearing me away to Heaven only knows what frightful doom, and again when I hung to those frail twigs, feeling my strength rapidly failing me—hearing the waters roaring below, as though exulting—Ah! it was horrible!"

With a little shudder, Mora covered her eyes with her hands. Frank Lightfoot made an impulsive movement toward her, as though about to clasp her in his arms and constitute himself consoler-in-chief, but only to draw back, putting his hands behind him, clasping them together until the flesh turned white with the spasmodic pressure.

"If I might venture to advise you, Miss Burgess," he said in slow, steady tones, that caused the girl to suddenly uncover her face and gaze at him wonderingly for a moment, "it would be to banish such thoughts forever; to forget that last night brought forth anything out of the ordinary run of events; and, above all else, never—"

With a short laugh the Miner Detective broke off of his own accord, leaving his sentence incomplete, substituting:

"Pardon my presumption, Miss Burgess, if you can. What right have I to offer advice, or to think that you would follow it, were I to prove a very oracle in my wisdom?"

Mora looked into his face wistfully, her eyes showing how troubled and grieved she was at his strange words and stranger looks. Then, with the impulse of a true-hearted woman,

she again caught his hand, speaking rapidly, earnestly:

"You bid me forget all—forget that I am indebted twice over to you for the life I still enjoy—but I will not believe that you mean all that implies. You may regret having acted on the impulse of the moment; may regret having risked your life for the sake of preserving mine; but I never can. While I live, I will remember! While I live, I will have before my eyes the sight of your face as I beheld it descending, as it seemed then, from the clouds—from Heaven itself—to save me from death! While I live, I will never forget the sound of your voice as you spoke to me then! And you—you should be the last man on earth to wish me to be so ungrateful!"

Her steady gaze drooped before his. He could see her trim form trembling with suppressed emotion, and he could not attribute it wholly to gratitude. Yet he was forced to choke down the glad words which leaped to his lips—forced to recall the sacred duty which he owed the dead, the oath which his lips had uttered while his right hand rested upon that pulseless breast—forced to close his eyes to what might well prove paradise, and gaze only upon its opposite. It was hard to do, but his stern will was equal to the task.

"Be it so, then, Miss Burgess," he uttered, with a forced laugh that seemed to her almost like a blow. "Perhaps it is too soon for me to appeal to sober reason, but the time will come when you will take a juster view of the matter. That I saved you from an awkward tumble, I'm free to confess, but that I thereby saved your life, I can hardly admit. I took the fall myself, and still I am here to tell the wondrous tale. But, to change the subject, have you heard how your friend, Miss Lyon, is progressing to-day?"

"She is better, I believe," was the low reply, Mora plainly struggling to quell her powerfully excited emotions, ashamed to make any further exhibition of them before one so callous, so plainly resolved to ignore the great services he had rendered her. "Her injuries were not very severe, but she is still suffering from the shock and fright. I am on my way to the house to pass the evening with her."

"Then I will detain you no longer from your charitable duty," he bowed, stepping aside from the path as though to give her free passage.

Mora mechanically stepped forward, but then paused. She glanced toward the house which she had recently left, then around her. There was no other building to be seen in the direction in which Frank Lightfoot was going when she met him, and a very natural belief assailed her mind. Still, she hesitated to mention it, for his strange manner had filled her with uneasiness, seeming to build up a barrier between them.

The Miner Detective noticed her hesitation, and spoke:

"By the way, your father; is he at home, Miss Burgess?"

"You are going to the house, then? I am so glad!" with a return of the girlish impulsiveness which Frank Lightfoot found so hard to resist. "Father is at home, and he will be so glad to see you. He has not had an opportunity of fairly thanking you for saving what be—rightly or not—calls his treasure. You may refuse to listen to me, but you will not find it so easy to place a spell on his lips," she laughingly added, blushing most charmingly as Frank Lightfoot mentally decided:

"If I call on him, it will be for a very different purpose than listening to thanks which are neither deserved nor hoped for," was the grave response. "You are pleased to make much of a very simple act. What I did was no more than my plain duty—no more than any man would have done had chance thrown the opportunity in his way."

"On that point you and father will differ quite as radically as we two," with a positive nod of the head. "I only wish I had not promised—that is—"

Feeling that she had suffered impulse to carry her tongue too far, Mora paused, blushing. Frank Lightfoot bowed gravely, his tone cold and almost harsh as he replied to the broken wish, rather than what she had uttered:

"You would find it but dry enjoyment, listening to our conversation on purely business matters, I fear, Miss Burgess. In this case at least, duty offers the best reward; and duty bids you keep your engagement with your injured friend."

The flush died away from her face, and there was just a faint sparkle of resentment in her black eyes as Mora dropped a courtesy to the seemingly stolid man, then turned and glided rapidly away in the direction of the Lyon residence. But her resentment was not sufficiently great to prevent her casting a glance over her shoulder before she had gone many rods. She saw Frank Lightfoot standing where they parted, gazing intently after her, and as she hurried on there was a soft light in her dark eyes, a faint smile playing around her red lips.

Frank Lightfoot did not feel much in the humor for smiling, though he had such a pleas-

ant object to watch. His brow was deeply corrugated, his strong jaws were doggedly set, his hands clinched until it seemed as though his finger-tips must sink beneath the skin of his palms.

Though he loved the fair woman as he had never even dreamed men could love—though all the time he was longing to clasp her to his breast and cover her red lips with passionate kisses, to force a confession of love from her, even as he laid bare his own heart—he knew he had acted coldly, even rudely, chilling her warm impulses if not changing budding love into distrust, if not disgust.

"But I had to do it!" he was muttering between his teeth as the maiden cast that shy backward glance. "If I acted like a senseless, boorish lout, it was to keep on the safe side of the fence. Had I given way to impulse—had I suffered my real feelings to show themselves, even for an instant—I could never have stopped half-way. And while my sacred vow is unfulfilled, I must remember duty before love."

Like a man rousing from a waking dream, Frank Lightfoot shook himself, casting a defiant glance around him, turning his back on that trim, neat figure now almost lost in the gathering twilight.

"I'll do my duty though it takes the hide off! William Courtright, here's to tear your cunning mask off, if it costs me the one bright dream of bliss that has ever crossed my life trail!"

All trace of emotion was banished from his face as Frank Lightfoot strode rapidly toward the house where Jeter Burgess lived. He had put all weakness behind him, resolved to keep his vow to the dead no matter what the cost to himself.

As he raised his hand to rap at the door, it was opened suddenly, and Jeter Burgess greeted him warmly.

"I saw you coming, my dear sir, and for fear you would pass by without stopping, I hastened to the door. Come in—and never mortal footstep crossed this threshold with a heartier welcome than I would give you, could I speak the sentiments of my inmost heart!"

His hands were shaking those of the Miner Detective, his high-bred countenance was filled with emotion, even as his strong voice trembled and his black eyes filled with moisture. If ever one man seemed overjoyed to meet another, then Jeter Burgess was the one. And the old doubt as to whether this man could be the escaped criminal, William Courtright, again assailed the Miner Detective's mind. It did not seem possible that such a merciless fiend could seem so honest, so manly.

Frank Lightfoot suffered himself to be led into the house, speaking not until they stood together in a small but snug and well-furnished room, where Jeter Burgess hastened to strike a match and light a lamp standing on the little table in the center of the room.

"I am so glad!" the mine-owner repeated, rubbing his hands excitedly as he saw his guest seated opposite him. "I could not tell you one-half what I felt last night, and would have called on you long before this, only I told myself you were more in need of rest than anything else. And Mora, dear child! She will be so disappointed at being from home! She knows I am not capable of expressing her thanks for your gallant conduct as well as my own."

"There are no thanks deserved, Mr. Burgess," coldly replied the detective. "I only performed a duty common to all mankind when I went to her aid. Any one else would have done the same, had he been given the chance."

"But not so gallantly—not so adroitly—don't tell me that!" the mine-owner cried, his eyes wet with tears as he reached over the table and caught Frank's hand in his. "Mora told me part, and I can guess the rest. You made sure of her life, without thinking of your own. You might have saved yourself by holding on to the lasso, but rather than endanger her life, you preferred to take that frightful fall! Laugh—sneer at it if you will; it will not make you any less a hero!"

Not a muscle of his face changed while the Miner Detective listened to this broken, fervent speech. He coldly withdrew his hand, keeping his sacred duty forever before him.

"You have said more than enough to cancel the fancied debt, Mr. Burgess," he began, only to be interrupted with:

"Then let me act, instead. You will not take offense, I feel confident, when none such is intended; therefore I will use plain language. You are not a very rich man, I believe?"

Frank Lightfoot shook his head in silence.

"I feared as much," with a bright smile that contrasted ludicrously with his words. "I have paid more attention to your concerns than you suspected, perhaps, and though I might have waited a little longer before making the proposal, had it not been for your conduct yesterday, I firmly believe it would have come in due time. You have no particular employment, I understand. Well, we want a superintendent for our mine, the Liberty. We are prepared to give a capable man \$5,000 per annum, if he gives satisfaction. I offer the situation to you, and sincerely trust you can see your way clear to accept."

Frank Lightfoot listened in silence, a cold, hard smile beginning to play around his firm lips. Disposed to suspect the man before him, knowing what he did, he fancied he saw in this really generous offer a bribe for his continued silence concerning the past, and he asked, almost harshly:

"Are you positive this offer would have been made had nothing particular happened yesterday?"

Jeter Burgess hesitated for a moment, then said frankly:

"Not so soon, perhaps, but—"

"Then I have no delicacy about refusing it," coldly interposed the Miner Detective. "I do not risk my bones for momentary reward. If I did, I would place the life of an only daughter at a much higher figure than you seem to give it."

It was a hard, insulting speech to make under the circumstances, and Jeter Burgess evidently felt it such. His face flushed hotly, then grew pale. He shrunk back as though he had received a heavy blow from a loved hand; but Frank Lightfoot, believing as he did, felt no compunction.

"With your permission, we will let that matter drop, now and forever. I did not come here to pose as a hero, nor to extort painful compliments from your lips, but on serious business. Perhaps you can give a guess as to its nature?"

Jeter Burgess slowly shook his head, his eyes filled with perplexity, his face gradually recovering its natural color.

"Then the less time we waste in preliminaries, the sooner we will come to the finish," said Frank Lightfoot, with a hard and unnatural laugh, leaning across the table and keenly watching his host as he added: "Did you ever know two persons who bore the names of Edna Irving and Calvin Apperley?"

A gasping cry escaped the lips of the mine owner, and his face turned pale as death itself as he shrunk away, shivering.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GHOSTS OF THE PAST.

THE lip of the Miner Detective curled almost savagely and his blue eyes glowed and glittered like steel in the lamplight as he sat watching the face of his host. He saw it turn pale as death itself; saw the muscles twitch and work; saw the manly form of the mine-owner quiver and shrink away, a wild and hunted light leaping into his eyes. And in his heart he felt a sternly fierce joy such as comes only to the successful hunters of men.

For years he had been taught to hate the man whom he believed he had at last cornered beyond all chance of escape. To him and his vile work in the days long gone by, he had owed the loss of all the world held dear to him; and now, as he gazed intently upon the face of the mine-owner, another face seemed to rise between them like a ghost of the past—the face of a dead man, aged and broken down long before his time.

He no longer thought of this man as the father of the woman whom he had learned to love, despite himself. He thought of him only as a vile criminal who must be made to suffer all the torture it lay in his power to inflict before the last crushing blow should be dealt. And he schooled his face to express alarm, his voice to simulate earnest sympathy.

"My dear sir, you are ill! What can I do for you?" he exclaimed, partly starting from his chair as though with the intention of summoning aid.

With a trembling motion of one hand, Jeter Burgess checked him, and then, his voice faint and husky, he muttered:

"No—I am better—it is nothing—serious."

But it looked very serious to Frank Lightfoot, as the mine-owner sunk back in his chair, his eyes closing, his face a dull grayish cast, one hand pressed against his heart. And for a brief space he believed that his sudden announcement had killed the man he had vowed to hunt to the very foot of the gallowes.

But then Jeter Burgess suddenly rallied, his color slowly returning, his eyes opening and his voice, though still husky, sounding clearer and more natural.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Lightfoot," he said, smiling faintly, "for thus alarming you. Unfortunately I am troubled at intervals with my heart, and just as you spoke, one of the spasms took me; but it is over now. You were saying—?"

"You are certain it will be prudent? May it not give you another and more severe attack if I continue?" slowly asked the Miner Detective, closely watching the face of his intended victim.

Jeter Burgess opened his eyes widely, an expression of half-amused surprise on his countenance as he made reply:

"Surely you did not think your words shocked me so severely, Mr. Lightfoot?"

"Was it not natural that I should? You were attacked just as I asked you if you ever heard of two persons named Calvin Apperley and Edna Irving."

"Which query I believe I failed to answer, thanks to my poor heart," the mine-owner re-

plied, smiling faintly, but betraying no other emotion that the keen-eyed detective could recognize. "It was merely a coincidence, I assure you, Mr. Lightfoot, and your words had nothing to do with it."

"I am glad to receive this assurance, but perhaps we had better postpone this matter until a more favorable opportunity."

"Not on my account," swiftly replied Jeter Burgess. "I am feeling as well as ever now, and it may be weeks or even months before I have such another spell. I pray you, my dear sir, do not hesitate to ask me any or all questions that can possibly throw any light on your business."

"You are very kind," with a bow that served to cover the cold smile of anticipated triumph from view. "Then we may consider that the question already put?"

"Answered in the affirmative. I did know both Calvin Apperley and Edna Irving, years ago," was the prompt reply.

Was his voice less steady? Did a trace of that gray, sickly shade begin to creep over his face, or was it only the flickering of the lamplight in the fitful breeze that came in through the open window?

"Good!" cried Frank Lightfoot, his eyes sparkling, his voice ringing with satisfaction. "I will have an attentive listener, then, although the story I have to tell is one full of sorrow and sin. And you will feel a closer interest in the matter, too, from having known the parties concerned."

The mine-owner suddenly rose from his chair and turned away to a small sideboard. He apparently had some little difficulty in unlocking it, for he fumbled with the key for several minutes before the faint click told of success. And he was still longer in selecting liquor and cigars from the stock kept therein.

Frank Lightfoot watched him as a cat watches a mouse. He could see a part of one cheek and one temple, both of which were paler than the wall beyond. And seeing this, he was well satisfied to wait, feeling confident that the torture of the criminal had already begun.

When Jeter Burgess turned once more toward the light, his face wore its wonted air of composure, while his voice was as steady as though he had not a care in the world.

"Talking is dry work without a sip of good liquor to moisten one's lips occasionally, while I am such a slave to my cigar—you will join me, my dear sir?"

Frank Lightfoot knew that the use of cigars and brandy would give him still better opportunities for watching the effect of his words on his victim, as well as prolonging the torture which he firmly believed he could inflict, but he shook his head in reply to this cordial invitation. Though he meant to drag this man to the gallows for his crimes, he could not so far dissemble as to partake of his refreshments.

"Thanks, but I never allow myself to indulge during business hours. Don't deprive yourself of your cigar on my account. It may serve to keep you in patience while I am prosing," he said, quietly.

Jeter Burgess waited to light a cigar before speaking.

"It seems unsocial, but you must pardon my weakness. Besides, I find that a good cigar or two after one of my heart-attacks, settles my nerves much better than medicine."

Frank Lightfoot bowed slightly, then, with his keen blue eyes fixed on the face of his host, he abruptly began his narrative of the past.

"Calvin Apperley was a distant relative of Edna Irving, in just what degree might not be easy to discover at this distant day, but that there was some sort of relationship, all parties concerned agreed. And it was this far-away claim to kindred that helped to throw the twain together more intimately than might otherwise have been the case."

"Apperley had once been married, but was then a widower. I believe his wife died very young, but that does not concern the story I have set myself to tell."

"At that time Edna had both father and mother, though she was deprived of them both while still nothing more than a girl. With them Calvin Apperley was a prime favorite, and when he told them he loved their only child and wanted to win her for his wife, they gladly took his hand and bade him god-speed. With both father and mother on his side, he felt that success might not be quite so far away as he had at first feared; that their counsel and wishes would turn the scale in his favor. You see, for all the poor devil had been married and widowed, he knew so little of womankind and her peculiarities!"

There was a hard bitterness in the tone with which this sentence was uttered that made Jeter Burgess glance quickly into the face of his guest. He met that burning gaze without flinching, and his voice was calm and steady as he asked:

"I was not very intimately acquainted with the gentleman; but was he not a great traveler?"

"Both before and after the period of which I am speaking, Calvin Apperley kept on the go pretty much all the time. Before he learned to

love Edna Irving, it was fondness for change that led him to travel; after that—well, he was seeking what Fate willed he should never find on this side of the grave.

"Of course I never saw her to speak of, but you who did know Edna Irving, can say whether the tales told of her great beauty of face and person were true or exaggerated."

Through the blue veil of smoke, Frank Lightfoot saw that sickly gray shade creep over the face of Jeter Burgess, and a smile of grim, fierce joy marked his own countenance for a single instant! Then it passed away, leaving his face as calm and inscrutable as that of the Egyptian Sphinx.

Not so with that of the mine-owner. Though he tried to smile, it was a painful effort, and his voice was shaky as he uttered the reply for which his guest was waiting:

"She was indeed a lovely woman—and good as she was beautiful. An angel on earth, I trust she is now an angel in heaven!"

A dark frown marked the face of the Miner Detective. This was not the sort of answer he had expected—not the answer one had a right to expect from the lips of a murderer, from one whose hands had sent that fair creature to be an angel! And harder than ever grew his heart toward such a matchless hypocrite—hypocrite indeed, were he William Courtright!

"So I have been informed," he said, coldly smothering his emotions beneath an icy mask; "if not in precisely those words, in others to the same effect. And being thus—young, beautiful, accomplished, rich—it is not to be wondered at that the charming Edna lacked not for suitors. Lovers she had none, at that time, but of moths who would gladly change into those convenient animals, she had scores."

"Among them poor Calvin Apperley, more manly than gentle, more truthful than polished, cut anything but a graceful figure. He was too much in earnest, perhaps; perhaps the mother and father, anxious to see their one ewe lamb comfortably settled in life, urged his suit too steadily; for courting by proxy meets with more disappointments than triumphs. But let that be as it may, when Calvin Apperley pressed his suit to a climax, it was only to meet with bitter disappointment, and the next day he fled from the scene, telling no one whither he was bound or when he intended to return."

"Those outside of the one family, shrugged their shoulders when they heard of this hasty departure. Calvin Apperley never did anything like the rest of the world. If not the original Wandering Jew, he was that gentleman's modern prototype. And so he passed out of their minds and memories."

"But it was not an idle whim that took Calvin Apperley so abruptly to the other side of the globe. He went in the vain hope of finding forgetfulness in absence. He went to hide even from himself the wound that made his big heart shed tears more bitter than gall. He went to forget Edna Irving and his love for the charmer; but he might better have remained on the spot for all he found of forgetfulness in those far-away regions. If he only had! Perhaps I might have had a vastly different story to tell you this evening!"

For the first time Frank Lightfoot suffered a trace of strong emotion to betray itself in both his tones and his face. Jeter Burgess involuntarily leaned forward in his chair, his eyes shining, his face eager, one hand partially lifted—but he sunk back again as the look vanished from the face of his guest, and it once more became hard and stern.

"For three years Calvin Apperley fought with his heart and his love, and at the end of that time he fondly believed he had gained the victory—that he could meet Edna Irving face to face, could listen to her words of welcome, could watch her smiles, her arch glances, without a tremor or a heart pang. And then he found himself dreaming by night of home—for so he still regarded the far away country—while his waking thoughts were ever turning in the same direction. He felt that it would be very pleasant to gaze once more upon the old home and the familiar objects of his boyhood. And acting on the impulse, he turned his face toward America."

"He should have learned the truth from the manner in which his pulse leaped, from his growing impatience—he, the old and experienced traveler who suffered nothing to unsettle his composure—as he drew nearer to land; but he obstinately attributed it to anything but the right cause. Edna Irving had nothing to do with it—as he told himself a hundred times each day."

"During his voluntary exile, Calvin Apperley had taken especial care to avoid reading any papers published in his native land, lest some chance paragraph might undo all his bitter work; he feared to see some mention of the marriage of Edna Irving. Thanks to this care, and his failure to leave any address with his few friends, he was in absolute ignorance of all that had transpired during those three years. He thought he was acting wisely, but he knew better when he came to realize all that had happened to his friends while he was absent."

"The first shock came to him with the knowl-

edge that his best friends, Mr. and Mrs. Irving were dead. They passed away within a month of each other, but little less than a year before he returned home. But heavy as was this shock, it was but a blow with a feather to what lay behind."

"Edna Irving was married, and had carried her fortunes to a pretty market, the gossips said. And some of them hinted—be sure they never dared breathe the foul suspicion a second time within reach of his strong arm!—that there had been no ceremony, though one was so badly needed!"

"There was some sort of mystery surrounding the affair, but after recovering from the first benumbing shock—for, despite his cold reasoning with himself when thousands of miles away, Calvin Apperley had come home to try his fortune once more with the only woman whom the earth then held for him—he set to work to get at the real facts of the case."

"He learned that Edna Irving, from a laughing, happy, sunshiny girl, was suddenly transformed into a sober, subdued woman. She kindly but decisively discouraged all her devoted slaves, and seemed content to live in utter quietness and seclusion with her parents, both of whom were in feeble health. Then, at the end of several months it began to be whispered about that she was married!"

"It was a choice morsel for the gossips, and you may be sure they made the most of it. More yet, when a little babe came to her, and still the man who should have been at her side in that hour, remained absent, unspoken of, unknown, as yet."

"When those vile rumors came to her ears, the young mother could no longer keep her secret. She sent the certificate of marriage to her clergyman and had him read it aloud in open church. Nothing was hidden; names, place and dates all were given to still those thrice-cursed tongues; but when was bitter scandal killed by plain facts? If overwhelmed by truth in one shape, it assumed another, and their lives were made hells on earth!"

"The parents took sick and died. Edna also was brought to the very door of death, and was forced to place her child in the care of another. And then, when she had not yet fairly recovered her health, those venomous tongues stabbed her even more cruelly than before."

"It soon became public property that Edna was deserted by her husband—if husband he had ever been; that he was even then living with another woman in far-away Colorado—some swore they had positive information that his new love was an Indian squaw!"

"It was more than woman could bear, and so she started alone, unguarded, to find her husband. Instead, she found death!"

He paused, gazing keenly into the face of his host. Slowly, almost apathetically Jeter Burgess spoke:

"I think I heard something of it at the time."

"Possibly you may remember the name of the murderer, who called in the aid of fire to destroy all traces of his crime?"

"I remember now—it was William Courtright!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

INNOCENT OR GUILTY?

VERY closely Frank Lightfoot watched the face of the mine-owner as he put these abrupt questions, but he was conscious of a curious mingling of relief and disappointment.

Jeter Burgess betrayed nothing more than a calm, commonplace interest in the matter, which might very well be attributed to politeness alone. There was no alteration in his face when Frank Lightfoot spoke of the murder of Edna Irving, and though a slight change came into it as he pronounced the name of the escaped assassin, it was nothing more than might honestly accompany the successful exercise of memory.

Had he not been so firmly convinced of this man's guilt in advance, Frank Lightfoot would have set him down as innocent of all connection with that terrible tragedy in the Lone Cabin Gulch. But he believed there could be no question as to the identity of Jeter Burgess with William Courtright, and no sane man could for an instant doubt the guilt of that one.

His strong jaws came together with a slight click as he resumed his former position, inwardly vowing to shake the iron nerves of the criminal before he touched him with the relentless hand of justice. Like an accusing vision there flashed before his memory the face of Mora Burgess; so plainly that the detective gave a start and glanced swiftly around the room; but his weakness lasted only for a single breath. Let the cost be what it might, he would prove himself faithful to the vow he made, long ago, with his hand on the breast of the dead.

"Your memory is perfectly correct, Mr. Burgess," he said, his voice cold and stern, but otherwise showing no emotion. "William Courtright was the name of the vile assassin. But to make everything clear as we go along, I must go back a little in my story. You will bear with my prosing?"

"My time and attention belong wholly to

you, my dear sir," the mine-owner courteously replied. "If you would only show me how I might better prove to you how grateful—"

Frank Lightfoot impetuously lifted his hand, with a restraining gesture, his face turning a shade paler. Just then he cared not to be reminded of Mora Burgess.

"You forget that that is a forbidden subject between us, Mr. Burgess," he uttered hastily. "You have already said too much for the slight service fortune willed I should render; anything further will give birth to disgust, instead of pleasure."

With a pained look upon his fine face, the mine-owner bowed. Though he said nothing, he looked both surprised and hurt by that brusque, almost rude tone and words.

"In order that you may thoroughly understand what led up to that dire tragedy, it is necessary for me to go back in my story to the days closely following that on which Calvin Apperley so suddenly departed from his childhood's home."

Frank Lightfoot paused in his deliberate speech, as the mine-owner made a quiet motion of one hand.

"It is really unnecessary that you should do so on my account, dear Mr. Lightfoot," calmly uttered Jeter Burgess. "My memory is growing fresher and clearer all the time, until I can recall incidents long since forgotten. I really fancy I could tell the story almost as well as you can, so far as mere details are concerned," with a slight laugh.

"I have not the slightest doubt as to that," pointedly retorted the Miner Detective, a cold and hard smile marking his handsome face for an instant. "I dare say you could give some details which even my steady search has failed to bring to light."

"Then, granting this, would it not spare both time and breath were we to take for granted all that you have skipped? Unless, of course, you have some especial reason for touching on every point," the mine-owner added slowly.

"I have particular reasons for not omitting a single detail," coldly replied the Miner Detective.

Jeter Burgess bowed politely, easily, his voice quite as suave and courteous as his manner.

"Then, of course, I am ready and happy to listen. Pray proceed, my dear sir, and I will try not to interrupt you again."

"Among the suitors which hovered more or less constantly around the fair Edna were two brothers named Courtright. Both were handsome, stalwart fellows, well educated and of agreeable address; but there all resemblance ended. Thomas was a blonde in complexion and hair, frank, truthful and mild mannered, open as day in all his actions. Bold enough when it came to the pinch, he was almost timid in his fear of hurting the feelings of those around him, and it was to this amiable failing that the great tragedy of his life may partly be attributed."

"William Courtright was the exact opposite of his brother in many respects. He took after his father's side of the house, I believe, while Thomas closely resembled his mother."

"William was dark in complexion, with jet-black hair and eyes. That he was handsome, no one could deny. That he was a favorite among the ladies was equally clear. But even those who knew and loved him best feared his fiery temper. When his will was crossed, or he fancied himself wronged by another, he was more like an insane man than aught else."

"Might he not have been really insane at those times?" suggested the mine-owner, his voice low but steady. "I have often wondered whether that was not the case when he raised his hand against his brother—but I am interrupting you. Once more I beg your pardon, dear sir."

"There was a strange degree of method in his madness, then," replied Lightfoot, with a hard laugh. "But we have not come to that point as yet."

"As I was saying, these two brothers fell in love with Edna Irving, though few who were not intimately acquainted with Thomas would have suspected the fact as far as he was concerned, for, true to his nature, he kept in the background and suffered his brother to have full swing."

"William pressed his suit vigorously, impetuously, as he did everything else, and for a time it seemed as though he was fated to be the favored one. His boldness crowded all the other suitors away until he had had his innings. But his time came at last, and he was firmly declined by Edna Irving."

"It was a heavy blow to him, and the first one he sought as soon as his first mad agony was past, was his brother. He had never suspected the truth—never dreamed that in Tom he had a rival; for the meek-spirited fellow kept his secret closely locked in his own bosom until the fate of his brother should be decided."

"Longer than that, if I am not misinformed," quickly interposed the mine-owner. "If he had come out like a man and made his confession, the same as did his brother, perhaps—nay, it is

almost certain there would have been no frightful tragedy to record!"

He spoke with earnestness, his dark eyes glowing, his handsome face marked by strong emotions, though this was of short duration. As though conscious of having betrayed too deep an interest in a story with which he claimed only the most remote connection, the mine-owner sunk back in his chair, smoking rapidly until a blue cloud obscured those keen eyes which were watching him so intently.

"I am not defending Thomas Courtright," coldly resumed the Miner Detective. "As you say, he might have followed a more manly course; but he loved his brother as few brothers love, and I suppose he was afraid of adding to his evident misery. Anyway, he kept his secret to himself."

"The brothers were not rich. They were barely making a living where they were, and as the Cherry Creek fever was then at its height, it is not so strange that William Courtright should propose their trying their fortunes in Colorado, or that the easily influenced Thomas should yield to his wishes. Anyway, that is how it turned out. The brothers settled up their affairs and set their eyes toward the land of riches."

"Before they departed, Thomas Courtright had an interview with Edna Irving, which partially opened the eyes of them both to the truth. Where the gay and impetuous William had failed to carry the day, the modest and retiring Thomas had made an impression which was not easily to be rubbed out. If there were no vows exchanged between the young couple that evening, it was only because they both feared the hot anger of William too much to suffer their lips to utter what their eyes so plainly expressed."

"Still, Thomas bore his brother company to the promised land. And dainty missives followed him, directed—still with an honest fear of hurting the sore heart of the rejected lover—to another name. And contrary to the old adage, their love only grew the stronger with absence, until it finally culminated in marriage."

"This was kept from the knowledge of William, though the young couple agreed that he must soon be told all; they would only wait until it could be done by degrees, thus softening the inevitable shock."

"The wedding ceremony was performed in secret, while Tom was absent, as his brother believed, on business connected with their mining claims, at Omaha. Instead, Tom ran down to St. Louis, where he was met by Edna, whose parents believed her on a visit to a schoolmate. They passed one blissful week together, then parted, to meet only once again in life."

"Tom returned to his mine and his brother, happy as a god. He meant to break the news to Will without delay, but the weeks and the months rolled on without the secret being told."

"The old love was not dead yet. Hardly an evening passed without Will's touching on the matter, saying that he would one day try his fortunes again. He was only waiting until he got rich. Then—and as often as Tom ventured to hint that possibly some other might have met with better fortune, his hot rage flamed out and he would swear to kill both Edna and her lover, if such should prove to be the case."

"It was weak and unmanly, I admit, on his part; but I am not acting as the advocate of Thomas Courtright. The course he followed was thickly strewn with mistakes, but none of them wicked enough to deserve the terrible punishment which fell to his portion in that black, bitter time coming!"

Frank Lightfoot ceased speaking, his eyes watching the face of his host closely; but there was naught to be read there save polite attention. And once more that doubt assailed him. Could it be possible that the real criminal—the man who had steeped his hands in the life-blood of a brother and that brother's no less innocent wife—could sit there and listen to the story of his dastardly crime without showing the slightest trace of compunction or remorse? If not, then Jeter Burgess could not be the vile assassin, could not be the long missing William Courtright!

But cold reason told the detective that his proofs could not have led him so far astray, and he resolutely banished the doubt, resolved to shake the iron nerves of this matchless dissimulator before the end was reached.

"In those early days, it was slow and uncertain work for letters to find the one addressed, if situated anywhere among the more remote diggings, and though poor Edna wrote to her husband when troubles came thick and fast upon her, he never learned the whole truth until they met face to face. Otherwise, weak and yielding as he had shown himself in his dread of his brother, he would certainly have hastened to her, rather than waiting for her to seek him in those wild regions."

"Some of the letters miscarried; others were delayed; and thus he was taken completely by surprise when a passing friend brought him a package of mail from Denver, to learn of her intended visit. There was not time for him to

go to Denver to meet her, and he had given her full descriptions of the mine and its surroundings, he knew she would lose no time in coming direct to him."

"Then he had to break the tidings to his brother, without delay. He did it as gently as lay in his power, but you, who know something of the fiery temper of William, can guess how the heavy blow was received."

He paused as though expecting a reply or some comment. Jeter Burgess waited to daintily brush the ashes from the tip of his cigar before speaking; but when he did answer, his voice was calm and steady, as though he had but a very faint interest in the subject under consideration:

"The result unfortunately shows that but too clearly. A man cursed with such an ungovernable temper is more to be pitied than condemned."

"What! you surely do not hold him justified in his bloody deed?" cried Frank Lightfoot, startled despite his nerves.

"Not at all; I simply say that he was not wholly without excuse. His brother knew of his passionate love for this woman; he had been the first confidant chosen by the heart-sore man; he had been a patient listener during all those months of seclusion to the burning hopes and wishes of his brother; yet he had said not a word, made not a sign that could enlighten the poor devil! All the time he had been living a lie, silently listening to another man's plans and hopes for winning the woman who was already a wife! Put it to yourself, my dear sir," Jeter Burgess said, his voice growing calmer than it had been while hastily enumerating the wrongs which William Courtright had suffered. "Was there not some excuse for his anger?"

"Possibly; but not for committing murder!"

"Is it so sure that he *did* commit it?" was the slow rejoinder. "I know that the circumstantial evidence was terribly strong—as well as I can recall the facts or assumptions as they were published at the time—but I remember, too, that there was nothing which could not be explained away—"

"Including the complete disappearance of William Courtright?" swiftly interjected Lightfoot. "Remember that he was never seen to be recognized after that dark and bloody night!"

"That, I admit, seems to fasten the crime upon his head," slowly replied the mine-owner, watching the rings of smoke rise toward the ceiling. "It is the blackest point in all that dark record; but even that might bear a different explanation. Might he not have met with the same fate? Might it not be that he also was slain, his body wholly consumed in the flames, or—"

"The remains discovered were taken from the hottest part of the fire. Had he been a sharer of their fate, some traces of his body would have remained."

"Yet he might have died, and been hidden somewhere among the rocks, the more surely to avert suspicion from the actual criminal. Mind, my dear sir, I am not saying that such was actually the case; I only repeat the reasonings which I remember occurred to me when I first heard of the sad tragedy."

"They are ingenious, I admit, but unfortunately they are not borne out by after events," coldly added the Miner Detective, one hand slipping into his breast as he uttered the words. "There was one point on which neither you nor I have as yet touched, which is conclusive evidence as to the guilt of William Courtright. We will come to that later!"

"As I said, after receiving the letter which announced the coming of his wife, Thomas Courtright could do nothing but await her arrival, amusing himself the while brushing the cobwebs from before the eyes of his brother. This he must have done, after a fashion, for though he was at the point where the stage passed nearest to his claim, he was alone, so far as the passengers aboard the coach could see. They afterward bore evidence that a more joyous meeting never came before their notice. All was joy and rapture—unconscious of curious eyes, the husband and wife embraced and showered their overflowing love on each other. It was a happy sight."

"And yet, that same night—she was foully murdered! And murdered by the original of this picture!" Frank Lightfoot cried, at the same moment dropping two photographs face up on the table before the mine-owner.

Keenly he watched for the expected self-betrayal.

CHAPTER XIX.

A CLIMAX POSTPONED.

It was less pronounced than Frank Lightfoot had anticipated, but still the mine-owner betrayed a certain degree of emotion as those portraits of the murdered dead were so abruptly spread before his eyes. His face certainly turned a shade or two paler, while the half-smoked cigar dropped from his fingers as he visibly shrank back; but that was all.

Almost immediately he recovered himself and bent forward with his eyes fixed steadily upon

the photographs. One brief glance at the pictured face of the handsome young man, then his gaze was riveted upon the other—on the laughing, charming features of the woman who had met such a terrible doom.

Almost breathlessly Frank Lightfoot watched, his own eyes glowing with a fire such as none save the successful hunters of men can comprehend, for he felt confident that, if really the guilty man, Jeter Burgess must surely betray himself when thus unexpectedly confronted by the likeness of his victim.

And once again that painful doubt assailed him as he saw how calmly the mine-owner scanned the picture, now holding it in a more favorable light with fingers that showed not the slightest tremor. Surely a guilty wretch could not hold his nerves so thoroughly under control.

"Well, what do you think of it?" suddenly demanded Frank Lightfoot, his voice harsh and bitter, irritated by repeated failures to produce the effect he anticipated.

The photograph dropped from the hand of the mine-owner and his dark eyes were lifted until they calmly met those blazing blue orbs. His voice was cool and even as he said:

"It is very like, if my memory does not fail me, though it was taken when she was very young. I think I have a better one, if you would like to see it."

As he spoke, Jeter Burgess rose from the table and crossed the room, pausing in front of a secretary. Frank Lightfoot distinguished a faint click as of a secret spring or a key turning in a peculiar lock. Then the mine-owner turned once more and returned to the table, a small book in his hand.

"I hardly think I can accuse myself of being a sentimental man," he said, with a slight laugh, as he unlocked the book with a tiny key attached by a golden chain, "but I must plead guilty to keeping an album containing pictures of those who were, in the days gone by, my friends. Among them—see!"

He opened the book near the middle, placing it before the Miner Detective. Frank Lightfoot uttered a low ejaculation of surprise, for before him lay a speaking likeness of the one who had been Edna Irving. It showed a woman, rather than a girl, and was plainly a more recent likeness than any he had before seen of her. From what he knew, he felt certain that it had been taken since the secret marriage of Edna Irving. How had it fallen into the hands of this man whom—*did* he feel positive he was William Courtright, the escaped assassin?

Frank Lightfoot found himself asking that puzzling question still again. With all his experience and knowledge of criminals—extensive for one of his age—he was beginning to feel lost in a fog. If this was indeed William Courtright, he was a marvelous actor, with nerves of steel and a face of stone. Surely so vile an assassin would not keep the likeness of his victim to serve as a constant reminder of the bloody deed? Surely he could not look and speak so unconcernedly about it?

With these thoughts flashing across his brain, Frank Lightfoot mechanically turned over the leaves of the album, pausing as he came to the photograph of a young man whom he instantly recognized as William Courtright. But what was his surprise when Jeter Burgess, leaning forward, with a faint smile on his pale face, uttered the words:

"Your humble servant when he was a score of years younger than at the present time!"

"Your picture!" exclaimed the detective, taken off his guard. "That of William Courtright, you mean?"

Jeter Burgess silently picked up the photograph which Lightfoot had produced in the first place, and laid it beside the one in the album. Then he said, lightly:

"Circumstantial evidence is not always infallible, my dear sir, as you will admit when you come to examine those two pictures closely. William Courtright and myself used to be thought something alike when we were young men together, though it was seldom one was mistaken for the other."

Frank Lightfoot closely examined the photographs side by side, and though he found the resemblance between them sufficient to deceive one at the first glance, he had no difficulty in deciding that they had indeed been taken from two different faces. And as he gazed, that old doubt came back to him more persistently than ever. Dearly as he would have liked to discover the long-lost assassin in some other than the father of Mora Burgess, his detective pride was awakened, and he crushed the doubt to silence.

"With a picture of Calvin Apperley, your collection would be perfect!" he laughed, his eyes harder than ever.

"I was not sufficiently intimate with the gentleman for an exchange, which, in those days, implied far more than it does at the present time," coolly replied the mine-owner.

"You will know him better before we part, perhaps," was the quick retort, whose hidden significance seemed entirely lost on the mine-owner.

"You expect him here, then?"

"If he should come?"

"Any friend of yours is sure of a warm welcome, my dear sir," was the quick reply. "When do you expect to see him?"

"When the day of resurrection dawns."

Jeter Burgess stared into the hard, lined face of his guest, as though he was beginning to suspect his brain had not wholly escaped injury in that frightful fall into the canyon; but he said nothing, and Frank Lightfoot resumed his story:

"This was the tidings which greeted Calvin Apperley on his return home from foreign parts. He learned it all, stunned, heart rent, almost stupefied by the horrible revelation. But he was not a man to die easily, and he soon rallied sufficiently to take a solemn oath to probe the affair to the very bottom—to never give over until the guilty wretch was brought to justice. And almost before those frightful words had ceased to ring in his ears, he was on his way to that distant gulch where the woman he loved so dearly had perished.

"He found the spot; he found the grave which the pitying miners had formed for the murdered ones; and when the moon shed her white beams over the lonely mound, he sunk upon his knees beside it, lifting his hands to heaven and recording a solemn vow which only death kept him from fulfilling to the very letter!"

"Calvin Apperley is dead, then?" asked Jeter Burgess as the Miner Detective ceased speaking to clear his voice which had so suddenly grown husky and indistinct.

"Dead, yes; but he left a successor—he left that vow of vengeance as a sacred legacy to one who is none the less determined to see justice done, let the blow alight where it will, let those suffer who may!"

Jeter Burgess gazed keenly at the flushed face of the young athlete, his lips compressing tightly. Twice he seemed on the point of speaking, of asking a question or making some remark, but as often he thought better of it and awaited in silence the pleasure of his guest.

He was not kept waiting long. Frank Lightfoot quickly regained control of his voice and feelings. In cold, measured accents he resumed his narrative:

"Though he felt that blow so bitterly, Calvin Apperley was not one to let the grass grow under his feet when he had a well-defined object in life. He recalled the hints which the gossips had let drop on his first arrival, and lost no time in searching out the one with whom Edna Courtright had left her child when she started on her journey to her grave.

"The child was gone, no one could tell him where. It was stolen within a month from the time Thomas and Edna Courtright came to their death. Though the deed could be positively placed on no one, a stranger had been noticed lurking suspiciously around the neighborhood, and as he was sought for in vain when the child was missed, he was never seen or heard of again. And after carefully comparing the different descriptions given of this mysterious stranger, Calvin Apperley came to the conclusion that he was none other than the assassin, William Courtright."

"I remember the rumor," slowly uttered the mine-owner. "But it seemed very improbable to me. Would a merciless assassin as William Courtright was pictured, be likely to burden himself in his flight with a helpless child—and that child the offspring of his victims?"

"I have known criminals to perform still stranger freaks than that," was the cold response. "The evidence that satisfied Calvin Apperley is good enough for me to act upon. That child was a girl. If living to-day, she would be about the same age as Miss Mora Burgess!"

Frank Lightfoot uttered these words sharply, his blue eyes glittering like polished steel in a bright light, keenly scrutinizing the face of the mine-owner the while, as though to note the slightest change. Once more he was baffled, by innocence or consummate acting, for without the slightest trace of either wonder or annoyance, though he surely was not so blind as to fail to see the drift of those questions, the mine-owner replied:

"Just about, I imagine. Mora was a little over one year old when I first heard of the tragedy. But do you really believe it was William Courtright who stole the child?"

"Who else would have taken the risk and the trouble?"

"First, answer me one question: was there not something said about a large fortune which was to fall to Edna Irving at a certain date? It seems to me I heard something to that effect, either shortly before, or immediately after, the tragedy."

"You are right," was the slow response. "A distant relative died a few months before Edna was married, leaving a will by which she was to succeed to the fortune on certain conditions: she was to obtain full possession when she became of age, or was married. If she died before marriage, or left no children, then the money was to go to her next of kin."

"I understand she did not take possession before setting out to find her husband?"

"I believe not. She could not claim it at

first, without betraying her secret; afterward, her mind was too sorely troubled to give plain business matters a single thought."

"When she died her child naturally became the heiress?"

Frank Lightfoot nodded, a wondering light filling his eyes, as though he failed to catch the drift of these queries.

"That child vanished mysteriously and was never heard of afterward. Now I will answer your first question by asking you another: Who was next of kin, failing the child?"

"Francis Fluery, cousin to Edna; but surely you don't—"

Jeter Burgess shrugged his shoulders, throwing out one hand with a deprecating gesture as he replied:

"I say nothing, because I have no proofs to bring forward in support of a charge. But this much I am willing to say: 'I knew Francis Fluery in those days. I know that he was a gambler, a common cheat at the card-table, though perhaps I was the only man living who could have convicted him of that. I know that he was the one who profited most by the death or disappearance of the child. I know that he was absent from his usual haunts at that very date, nor did I ever hear his absence satisfactorily explained. And on the contrary, I know that William Courtright could have no possible motive in running such great risk of being recognized and arrested for murder, merely for the purpose of stealing a child.'"

"You think Fluery stole the child, then?"

"It was my impression at the time, though, of course, I had only suspicions to go by."

"You knew Fluery intimately, then?"

"Not so. I knew very little of him save through the report of a man whom I engaged to investigate the matter on the quiet. Though I once caught him cheating at cards in a public gaming-hall, I never met him more than two or three times."

"You say you had a detective at work investigating your suspicions; what discoveries did he make?"

"Nothing of moment; about all he did was to confirm my opinion of Fluery's rascality. Then I was forced to leave the country, and the matter was dropped, so far as I was concerned. Still, I am almost certain that Fluery stole the child, the more surely to get hold of the fortune."

"Belief is no proof, and the weight of evidence still leans toward William Courtright as the thief. But we will let that question rest for the present."

"Calvin Apperley spent many a long month in trying to find the missing child, firmly believing that doing so would lead to the discovery of the man who murdered Thomas and Edna Courtright; but he was foiled at every point."

"Year after year he passed with only that one end in view, growing old long before his time, wearing himself out in body and mind, but never faltering while he could travel. He felt that the time must come soon when his bodily powers must fail him altogether, and he made preparations for winning his vengeance, even after the grave should inclose him forever."

"As I told you, he was a widower. His wife died young, but not until she had borne him one child—a son. That boy Calvin Apperley dedicated to vengeance. He placed him where he could be trained in athletic sports, while not neglecting his mind. He was under charge of a firm of private detectives, who were to bring him up with all the care possible, to step into the shoes of his father when that father was claimed by death. And one day when he knew the summons could not be unanswered longer, Calvin Apperley sent word to have the boy—a young man now—brought to his bedside."

"That son was Frank Lightfoot?" slowly asked Burgess.

"It was. And standing by the side of the father whom I loved with all my heart—whom I had been taught to revere almost as one is taught to worship his God—I heard the sad story of Edna Irving and her sadder fate."

"He told me all, without reserve, for as I was to step into his shoes, it was only fit that I should be thoroughly armed for the battle. He bade me have no thoughts for woman or for love—bade me consider myself dedicated to vengeance alone while that dread crime remained unavenged. He bade me never forget that his eye was upon me, even though the grave held his body. He would watch my course and praise or curse his son according to his deserts."

"A sad—a terrible death-bed!" muttered the mine-owner, with a little shudder as he cast a quick glance into that strong, handsome face, now so pale and stern.

"Terrible? Ay! and who made it so?" fiercely demanded the detective, his eyes glowing with a red light that seemed powerful enough to scorch and shrivel up whatever it fell on.

"Who but William Courtright, the midnight assassin—the cowardly murderer of a helpless woman! And remembering this, do you wonder that I took the oath he asked? Ay! I took it, though he was dead before he could

hear my lips pronounce the words. I swore I would never give over the hunt while life lasted, or until I had brought the villain to justice. I took the vow with my hand on the breast of my dead father, and I have hunted for the murderer ever since that day until now, when I can place my hand on his—"

The door was suddenly thrown open, and a man staggered across the threshold, huskily gasping:

"Mora—is she here?"

They recognized Frederick Lyon, his clothes torn, his face bloody—then he sunk to the floor in a heap, like a corpse!

With startled cries, the twain leaped to their feet.

CHAPTER XX.

A MYSTERY OF THE NIGHT.

ONE minute later and the strong hand of the Miner Detective would have closed on the shoulder of the man, whom he felt must be William Courtright, and his voice would have uttered those fateful words which have carried consternation to so many crime-stained souls; but now they stood almost side by side, gazing wide eyed at the prostrate form, all forgotten save the one whom they both loved so dearly.

Mora! Where was she? What had happened to her?

Frank Lightfoot was the first to recover from that heavy shock, and he the one to reach the side of the fallen man and lift his bare, blood-stained head from the floor. And as he did so, he called out to Jeter Burgess sharply:

"Water—bring water and brandy—haste! For her sake, step lively!"

His fingers and eyes were both at work while he spoke. He saw that the blood came from a narrow gash on the senseless mine-owner's scalp, and even in that moment of great excitement and painful suspense, Frank Lightfoot caught himself wondering that so strong a man should be so utterly prostrated by a seeming trifle like that.

"There must be something more than this scalp wound," he muttered, as Jeter Burgess brought him water and brandy. "Look for knife or bullet hurts while I bathe his face."

Without a word Jeter Burgess obeyed, his face white as that of a corpse, his hands trembling so violently as to almost refuse their office. Frank Lightfoot bathed the face of the motionless man freely, but without producing the desired effect. A muttered exclamation that was almost an oath escaped his clinched teeth as he glanced toward his companion.

"Have you discovered any hurt?" he asked, sharply.

Jeter Burgess shook his head, seemingly unable to utter a word. Frank Lightfoot saw this, and his heart warmed toward the man, though only a minute earlier he had been on the point of arresting him as a murderer. He gently lowered the head of Frederick Lyon to the floor, saying:

"This will never do, Mr. Burgess! You are giving way just when your greatest endeavors are necessary. Brace up—for your daughter's sake! She may need all your help—"

His voice or his words seemed to break the curious spell which had fallen over the mine-owner when he saw Frederick Lyon in such a pitiful plight and heard him ask for Mora. The father caught at the nearly full bottle of brandy, and without looking for cup or glass, he drained its contents down his throat. And even as he dropped the emptied bottle, there came a tinge of color into his face, and the wild stare in his eyes turned to a more natural expression.

"There! I can see—can think, now!" he muttered, gently pushing the detective aside and himself kneeling by the motionless man. "He is not dead—he must be made to speak, if only a word to tell me where my poor child has gone!"

Altogether it was a strange case. Only that gash through the scalp, with a larger contusion on the rear of the head, could be found; neither shot nor cut on head or body were to be discovered; yet Frederick Lyon lay there without life or motion, despite all their efforts at restoration. True, they managed to extract several low, gasping moans, while the mine-owner breathed with greater regularity than at first; but that was all.

For what seemed an age the two men labored over him, believing that from his lips alone could they ever learn the full meaning of the wild cry he uttered when first coming upon them; but then Frank Lightfoot, his blood on fire, his iron nerves beginning to give way before the terrible strain, said:

"Do what you can. I'll go out. Maybe we can get at the truth quicker thus."

He did not wait for a reply, but flung the door wide and sprang outside, glancing quickly around him, looking for he knew not what.

The town was still, and without any symptom of being excited. Never noted for gambling, carousing, or the wild rowdyisms which are such a prominent feature in the vast majority of mining-camps, Independence City was even more calm than usual this night. Her citizens had exhausted their "superfluous

steam" on the occasion of the "celebration," and were now quietly recuperating.

Frank Lightfoot glanced toward the Lyon mansion, but he could only detect one light, faintly showing through a curtained window, doubtless coming from the chamber where the injured Goddess of Liberty was lying. Between the two houses he failed to detect anything suspicious by the clear moonlight, and he was on the point of turning back to the house, when he heard a rapid footstep coming toward him. Wheeling, he faced Jeter Burgess, who hurriedly uttered:

"I can learn nothing from Lyon. His brain must be seriously injured from those blows, and it may be days before he is able to give an explanation—days, while the life of my poor darling may rest on as many minutes!"

His voice died away in a hollow groan of deepest anguish while he rung his hands with a fierce despair that Frank Lightfoot felt he could fully appreciate.

Even at that moment Mora might be suffering pangs worse than death a thousand-fold! He remembered the reckless attempt at abduction only four-and-twenty hours before. Might not this be a second and more successful effort? And apparently the same fear occurred to the mine-owner.

"If he could only speak! If he could only utter one word or make one sign by which we could act!" he groaned, bitterly.

His apparent helplessness spurred the young detective to immediate action, and he cried sharply:

"We must do the best we can, while waiting for him. Do you go over to the house and see when and how he left it. It is barely possible that something has happened to Mora there, and he was hurt in bringing you the news. I'll go through the town and see if anything is stirring. Come back here, and we will then consider what is best to be done next."

Without a word of objection Jeter Burgess set off toward the Lyon residence, while Frank Lightfoot strode swiftly into the town, using his eyes more than his tongue.

He did not have much hopes of making a discovery, for he knew that if the citizens suspected crooked work concerning their mayor and the belle of the camp, they would not be taking matters so quietly. With scarcely a pause or a lost step, Frank Lightfoot passed through the principal streets, then hastened back to the Burgess residence, hoping against hope that Jeter Burgess would have better tidings.

Only to be disappointed. He saw the mine-owner returning from his mission, and ran to meet him. Before a word was uttered, they each saw that failure had rewarded the other.

"I could learn nothing there," huskily uttered the father, as Frank Lightfoot slowly shook his head as his sole report. "Only that Lyon and Mora left the house for her home, at nine o'clock!"

"And now it is past eleven!" cried the detective, startled despite his strong nerves. "Where was Frederick Lyon all that time? Two hours! A lifetime—and we condemned to wait and do nothing while—"

He did not conclude the sentence, for the tight grip on his arm warned him to choose his words more carefully, unless he wanted to have Jeter Burgess break down entirely.

"Back to the house, then!" he substituted, setting the example. "Frederick Lyon must be made to speak, though the next breath he draws ends in death! You say you practiced medicine once; what is your skill worth if it cannot loosen that man's tongue for one little minute?"

The young man was scarcely conscious of his words. His brain and will power had been severely tested during the last few days, by his stern struggle with what he deemed a sacred duty. Until he came to Independence City, he had never even dreamed of failing in love with women. Until then, his sole aim in life was to carry out the vow he had uttered while standing by the side of his dead father.

Chance had brought him in contact with Mora Burgess two or three times before he learned her name, or that she was anything to the man whom he believed to be his prey, and before he suspected any such thing, Frank Lightfoot was over head and ears in love. It was this love that made him spend so much more time than he had calculated on, before resolving to arrest the one he decided must be William Courtright. It was this love, hopeless as he told himself it surely must be, that gave him such a bitter anguish now when he felt that the object of it must be in danger, while he was powerless to aid her.

If only Frederick Lyon could speak!

Back to the house they hastened, hoping against hope that the injured man had regained his senses while they were absent, and Jeter Burgess flung open the door, entering without noticing the white square which marked the center of the door—a fluttering bit of paper which most assuredly had not been there when they left the house!

Frank Lightfoot grasped this and tore it from the sharpened nail which held it in place, step-

ping hastily inside. He cast one glance toward the couch on which Frederick Lyon was resting. Beside him knelt Jeter Burgess, gently shaking him by the shoulder, begging him to speak. With a groan of despair, the bereaved father turned his pale face toward the young detective, muttering huskily:

"No use! His brain must be affected. If he should die without speaking! Mora, my darling! where are you? What has happened? Who could be so cruel as to tear you away from me—all I have left on earth to love?"

A sharp cry escaped the lips of the young man, whose keen eyes hastily glanced over the lines written on the paper.

"Look! I found it pinned fast to the door! It partly explains the mystery!" cried Frank, holding the paper toward the afflicted parent.

Eagerly Jeter Burgess grasped at it, tried to read, but failing; his eyes were unable to perform their duty, and the heavily traced characters danced and spun before them. Handing the document back to the detective, he hoarsely uttered:

"Read it—I cannot—be quick!"

Holding the paper so that the lamp-light fell squarely upon it, Frank Lightfoot complied, his voice clear and distinct.

"JETER BURGESS, Esq.:

"DEAR SIR:—Borrow no trouble on your daughter's account, for she is as safe and as tenderly guarded as though she were in the treasure vault of the Bank of England. At present she is the honored guest of the subscriber; the duration of her visit will depend mainly on yourself.

"You are a wealthy man, Jeter Burgess, while I am poor, if not particularly honest. Being poor, I naturally favor the redistribution of property, and as the surest method of converting you to the same opinion, I have persuaded your daughter to lend me her influence, as well as her company.

"In plain English, I hold your child for ransom. I estimate her value, at this writing, at \$30,000. If you or your friends make any attempt to recover her before the ransom money is fairly paid, she will only be worth what you feel inclined to spend for a coffin, a grave and a funeral.

"If you are prepared to pay the sum demanded, without debate or demur, hang a white cloth over a black one, to the top of the flag-staff on the pavilion. It will meet the eyes of those most interested, and you will shortly afterward receive full instructions for the exchange.

"If, on the contrary, you value your money above the life of your daughter, and try to discover her hiding-place before paying the price, better order your mourning garments at once, for, by all that's evil and desperate, you will never again see Mora Burgess in life!

BUSINESS IN A MINUTE."

When Frank Lightfoot finished reading this curious document, Jeter Burgess dropped into a chair and covered his face with his trembling hands. The detective watched him in silence for a brief space, his heart moved to pity, notwithstanding his firm conviction that he saw before him the merciless murderer of Thomas and Edna Courtright. If a criminal, he was a man as well, and a man whose heart was now wrung with bitterest fear and most poignant anguish.

Not for long did the mine-owner remain thus crushed. He sprang to his feet, glanced toward Frederick Lyon, who was lying motionless on the couch, breathing heavily, unnaturally, then turned to the Miner Detective, his voice husky and broken.

"What can we do? Advise something, for Heaven's sake! I will go mad if I am forced to remain idle while she, my poor, poor girl—"

His voice broke and he could not end the sentence.

"There is only one thing I see left for us to do, and that is to wait for dawn or the return of his senses," slowly replied Lightfoot, glancing perplexedly toward Frederick Lyon.

This strange stupor puzzled him. He could hardly believe a strong man like the mine-owner could be so utterly prostrated by blows such as he had received, neither of which had fractured the skull, so far as their skill could detect.

"If we knew all that had happened, we might, by moving rapidly and secretly, take the audacious scoundrel by surprise before the return of day, without giving him time to put his dastardly threat into execution. As it is, we can only wait for light, or for the return of reason to—"

He ceased speaking with a sharp cry, springing to the couch where Frederick Lyon lay. He saw the mine-owner move slightly, turning so that one hand dropped to the floor.

"Quick!" he cried, excitedly, to Jeter Burgess, "he is beginning to come to! The brandy—lively, man!"

His last words were superfluous. Jeter Burgess saw the motion, and instantly his professional instincts were awakened on behalf of his partner, only strengthened by the hope of learning more concerning the abduction of his daughter.

Under his skillful ministrations, Frederick Lyon shortly opened his eyes, staring around him with a dazed air until he caught sight of the pale face bending so anxiously over him. Then a husky, gasping cry escaped his lips, and he started to a sitting posture, glaring wildly around him as he gasped:

"Mora—where is she—child?"

Frank Lightfoot was checked by the grave

motion of his host, who feared the result of any abrupt questioning. He gently forced his partner to taste a little brandy, soothing him as best he could, nursing back his strength and reasoning faculties, little by little. Then, when his experience told him that there was no particular danger to be dreaded, he tremblingly put the momentous question.

"You left the house to escort Mora here. Where were you when she was stolen from you, old friend?"

"Stolen?" echoed Lyon, turning pale as death, his eyes filling with a blazing light. "Stolen—where is she?"

In a few minutes he recovered sufficiently to tell his story connectedly. He remembered having reached a point nearly midway between the two houses, when they met an apparently drunken man, staggering toward them, singing and hiccupping. They stepped aside to permit the fellow to pass—and after that he was conscious of nothing more.

"The scoundrel must have turned and felled me with a club or a billy, if he was the one who stole the poor child!" he muttered, reflectively, then flaring up fiercely:

"But we'll rescue her—we'll tear her from him and roast the foul fiend over a slow fire!"

Frank Lightfoot silently handed him the paper, which he hastily read, half-aloud, breaking in with many savage interjections. He dropped the document, saying with forced calmness:

"The fiend means what he says. The money must be paid. I will pay, rather than endanger her life for one moment!"

CHAPTER XXI.

UNCLE FULLER PLAYS TO GET EVEN.

A MORE miserable wretch could not have been found within the whole confines of Colorado than was Uncle Fuller when he finally escaped from the hands of the stablemen, who seemed to feel an honest, yearning desire to fairly earn the gold cast them by the liberal detective. Without a dry thread to his name, and feeling as though the cold water had saturated him through every pore even to his very bones; feeling limpsy and washed out; huskily gasping for breath, too nearly drowned to even whisper the curses which were so rapidly breeding in his soiled heart; the pumped-up tramp dragged himself away from the scene of his worse than discomfiture as best he was able, followed by a laughing, jeering, mocking rabble.

He dared not pause for breath or to utter any of the curses which seemed on the point of choking him, for he knew how little it required to set such a crowd into perilous motion; and mob law never yet favored such as Uncle Fuller.

And then, when he had left Independence City fairly behind him; when the crowd thinned and finally faded entirely away, leaving the wretched tramp alone out on the plain; when those ominous yells and threats no longer tore through his brain; Uncle Fuller sunk down into the stupor of exhaustion, lying there in the hot afternoon sun like one whose earthly pilgrimage had carried him to this desolate goal.

But the tramp was one who had suffered too many hard buffets from fortune in his day to succumb long to this one. Even as he lay there like a dead man, his brain was busied with schemes and plottings for revenge; on the man who called himself Frederick Lyon, rather than on Frank Lightfoot, for Uncle Fuller, right or wrong, attributed all his misfortunes to the mine-owner.

"Ef the pesky hog'd come down with his ducats when your Uncle Fuller hinted at 'em, this wouldn't 'a' come to pass. I wouldn't 'a' struck that 'tarnal 'tective fer a yard; he wouldn't 'a' chucked me out o' winder; them pizen critters wouldn't 'a' hed the chaine fer to play the pump onto the ole man; an' it's all 'long o' him, the billy-be-durned 'ristocrat!" the wretch muttered, lifting his head and shaking his clinched fist in the direction of the Lyon residence.

"Ef you'd 'a' bled like a gentleman, durn ye, the ole man wouldn't 'a' interviewed Lightnin'—which it's your Uncle Fuller as is bettin' his last dollar that the critter's head was level as a billiard-table when he tuck that name! Ef he ain't jes' little ole chain-lightnin', double greased an' an'tinted with 'lectric oil, the devil's a hog an' I ain't your Uncle Fuller!"

Revived by the genial rays of the sun, and probably benefited by the cool bath from the vigorously worked pumps, the tramp sat up and with elbows supported on his crooked knees, his chin resting between his joined palms, he gazed long and intently toward Independence City. His thoroughly washed face was not an agreeable study just then, for on it were written varying emotions, none of them born of virtue or forbearance.

The sun sunk lower and hid itself behind the low range of distant hills, before the tramp made another movement. Then he rose erect, his eyes glowing redly, his face contorted with savage rage and hatred as he shook his tightly clinched fist toward the town. And through his snaggy teeth came hissing:

"Ef I cain't bleed ye in one way, Bill Court-

right, I'll do it in another! You kicked the ole man out-doors an' left him 'bout tossin' him a dollar to git a kiver over his head this night; look to it that the shelter which is 'bove an' round you this night, ain't tuck away afore day comes! When the red cock crows, think o' your Uncle Fuller, honey!"

Like one who has carefully studied out every detail of his plans, Uncle Fuller struck straight out for the not very distant hills near the mouth of the canyon through which the river raced. He made no effort to conceal his trail before the fording place was reached; on the contrary, he seemed to invite inspection. But it was different when he gained the river. Then he selected the most rocky spots for his feet to press, turning abruptly away from the ford and making his way by a circuitous route half the distance around the town. Then as if satisfied he had done sufficient to throw all suspicion from his shoulders, Uncle Fuller moved more boldly through the night.

All of these maneuvers had consumed time, and the night had fairly set in before the tramp began working his way directly toward the Lyon residence, carefully avoiding the town and keeping as much within the shadows as possible. He paused long enough to assure himself that his revolver was in good working order, the metallic cartridges having, as a matter of course, escaped injury in that thorough ducking.

You don't ketch your Uncle Fuller fightin' when he kin use his heels instid," the rascal grinned as he once more resumed his journey, "but it must be ban's off fer them as don't want to feel his teeth this round! It makes a heap o' differ' to sech critters as them who it is as sots a bonfire to bleezin' up, an' a sight more what that bonfire's made out of. Let his shack ketch fire, an' the ole man spied in them vicinity, an' it wouldn't take overly long fer to hev a rope necktie fitted onto his lily white thrapple—no sir!"

This reflection caused the tramp to use more caution in advancing, until he almost crawled along on his belly. Knowing as he did what short shrift he might expect at the hands of the citizens were he detected in the attempt to burn the residence of the mayor, his hatred was still great enough to prevent his nerve from failing him. He had no other scruples. At heart Uncle Fuller was a thorough-paced scoundrel, with scarcely a single redeeming trait in his character. A drunken, worthless rascal, he even felt a savage thrill of delight as he thought of Cleonice Lyon lying helpless in the chamber from whose window he could even then see a light dimly shining.

"Let her see what a genuine fire means!" he muttered below his breath as he paused once more to thoroughly scan the lay of the ground around and before him. "Let the han'some young squirt come an' show his heroickality ag'in by totin' her out o' the burnin' shell! An' 'tain't your Uncle Fuller as'll weep his two peepers out ef nuther one nur the t'other on 'em gits shet o' the fire-trap—no he jes' won't, honey! Hellow! what's that?"

Like a cautious general, Uncle Fuller was keeping an eye on his rear and both flanks, as well as in advance, and now he crouched closer under cover as he caught a glimpse of something in motion at no great distance from him, a little to the right and in his rear, when his face was turned toward the residence of Frederick Lyon. It seemed to be the figure of a man, and as he watched its slow approach with breathless attention, the bummer unconsciously licked his lips, for he caught the droning notes of a drunken attempt at singing.

"Good Lawd!" he muttered, almost unconsciously. "Ef he'd on'y tum'le down an' break his durned ole neck—an' your Uncle Fuller could fin' a full bottle o' budge onto him!"

As this pious wish escaped his lips, the tramp cast a quick glance around him, at the same time tightening his grasp on the butt of his pistol. He felt the need of liquor the more the nearer he drew to his nefarious work, and despite his natural cowardice, he almost resolve to waylay and knock the drunken man senseless on the vague chance of finding liquor on his person; but this idea died away almost as soon as it found birth, for the keen eyes of the bummer fell upon two more dimly visible figures moving through the clear moonlight.

They were coming from the direction of the Lyon residence, and were not much further from the covert of the tramp than was the drunken man.

Thinking only of how to escape notice, now, Uncle Fuller lay motionless beneath his cover, fairly holding his breath as the parties drew nearer together, at the same time approaching his hiding-place.

The staggering, reeling figure passed his covert first, and then, as he could watch steadily in one direction, Uncle Fuller caught his breath with a hissing gasp as he recognized the shape of Frederick Lyon in one of the other couple. His right hand mechanically sought the butt of his revolver, and he even drew the hammer partially up before he realized what he was doing. Had Frederick Lyon been alone!

With this thought crossing his mind, Uncle

Fuller became an astonished witness of what followed. He saw Frederick Lyon draw his companion—plainly a woman—aside from the path, as though to give free passage to the drunken fellow. He saw the latter wheel swiftly and strike a blow from behind the mine-owner—saw Frederick Lyon drop to the ground like a dead man. He heard the woman utter a faint cry as the supposed drunken man caught her up in his arms; heard her utter the one word "father!" then felt, rather than saw, the bold abductor stifle her voice with a heavy cloth of some sort as he strode rapidly away from the spot!

In obedience to the faint instincts of manhood, Uncle Fuller started forward as soon as he could recover from his surprise, drawing his pistol to defend the attacked; but the impulse died away almost as soon as it was born. The sound of that one word uttered by the terrified woman recalled his intense yearning for revenge, even while it showed him a less dangerous method of obtaining it than the one he had formed.

Marking the course of the rapidly-retreating abductor, Uncle Fuller stole rapidly toward the prostrate mine-owner. There was murder in his heart, though he had as yet formed no definite plan of procedure, and he was startled into hasty action as the mine-owner uttered a low exclamation and seemed on the point of rising, no doubt catching the sound of his approaching footsteps.

Agilely as a cat, Uncle Fuller leaped forward and brought the butt of his revolver down upon the head of the struggling man before it could turn toward him. With a gasping moan, Frederick Lyon dropped upon his face. The tramp only paused long enough to deal him a brutal kick in the side, then crouching low and making the most of the scattered cover, Uncle Fuller hastened after the still visible figure of the kidnapper.

All this had taken place with such rapidity that Uncle Fuller had acted almost entirely on impulse, without any idea whither his deed would carry him. True, when he recognized the man whom he hated so rancorously; when he saw his downfall and heard that appealing cry; when he took that word as a proof of the woman's being really the daughter of the mine-owner; he vaguely recognized a chance to strike a heavier blow at his enemy than even by using the torch; but even when he set out in stealthy pursuit of the kidnapper he acted on no settled plan.

With vision and wits both thoroughly cleared by that enforced bath, Uncle Fuller dogged the abductor, who rapidly made his way through the scattered rocks, heading for the plateau beyond, circling around the house of Jeter Burgess at a safe distance, his course clearly mapped out beforehand. The base of the steep ascent was reached without a halt, but then the pursuing tramp suddenly dropped down behind a rock as he saw the villain come to a pause, evidently to gain strength for the climb with his seemingly unconscious burden.

None too soon did the tramp hide himself either, for the bold stranger turned and closely scanned the field behind him as though to make sure his desperate deed had not attracted unwelcome attention. Seemingly satisfied on this point, after a breathing spell of a few minutes, he raised the limp figure of his captive higher on his shoulders and began climbing the hill in a diagonal course.

Watchful, ready to drop under cover at any moment, Uncle Fuller stole along in slow pursuit, reaching the slope and surmounting it only a few seconds later than the stranger.

As he cautiously peered over the level space before him, the tramp caught sight of the man hastening along toward the rocky hills beyond where the river struck the opposite side of the plateau, and keeping himself well covered by the bank, Uncle Fuller made the best of his way along the sloping side of the plateau, now and then lifting his head for a view of his game.

It was hard work for a close, warm evening, and before the end of his curious trail, Uncle Fuller's rags were almost as wet as when he escaped from the hands of the stablemen. But though he panted heavily; though his bones ached and his throat was parched, he doggedly persisted, keeping the kidnapper more or less fully in view, for he saw either revenge or gold at the farther end of that hurried journey.

He was given an occasional resting and breathing spell, though the abductor appeared to have muscles of tempered steel and lungs like a blacksmith's bellows, and these Uncle Fuller devoted to recuperating his own powers of body and wind, with more or less success.

"It's the bonanza come back ag'in all the brighter, ef in a little different shapel!" he muttered, brushing the hot drops from his heated brow. "Ef I kin on'y git the top side o' that p'izen critter—Durn his hide! thar he goes ag'in!"

It was one of the toughest bits of work the bummer had tackled for many a long day, but he proved himself equal to the task in the end. With dogged persistence he kept the kidnapper in view until he was fairly run to earth; and what was better still, he did this without

once awakening the suspicions of the one whom he was following.

After spending more than an hour in picking his way through the tangled masses of rock with which the side of the mountain range was strewn, the kidnapper suddenly disappeared at the base of a vine clad rock. Uncle Fuller rubbed his eyes and stared open-mouthed, for a little space believing himself the victim of an optical delusion; but fortunately for the hopes which he had formed, he remained hidden from casual observation until the dark shape of a human being was outlined against the white rock beside the spot where the kidnapper had so abruptly passed from view.

"Durned ef it ain't the critter!" muttered Uncle Fuller, sinking more completely under cover as he glared anxiously toward the dark shape. "He ain't got the gal no longer. Hes he come to the furdur eend o' the trail, or did he ketch a glimps' o' your Uncle Fuller, an' is he come back fer to take his skelp? Them's the questions which—Good enough!"

He saw the dark shape turn and again fade from view. He closely scanned the vicinity of the vine-clad rock, and satisfied himself that it was impossible for a human being to pass to either side without his seeing it. Hence there was but one conclusion to be drawn; the rock contained or lay over a cave of some sort, the entrance to which was perfectly hidden from casual observation by the hanging masses of foliage.

"Anyway, your Uncle Fuller's gittin' time fer to ketch a good long breath," the tramp muttered as he lay low, his red eyes fixed intently upon the spot. "Ef they ain't a hole plum' through the durned ole mounting, it's all right. I know whar they be, an' they don't know thar Uncle Fuller's watchin' 'em like a hop-toad do a blue-bottle!"

For fully half an hour Uncle Fuller maintained his close watch, without seeing or hearing anything of the kidnapper, at the end of which period he changed his location for another which was more comfortable, besides affording better concealment. The perfect silence which reigned was gradually giving him an uncomfortable suspicion that the man whom he had thus far trailed so laboriously had given him the slip after all, when to his delight the kidnapper once more appeared beside the white rock, alone, as before.

After a slow scrutiny of the vicinity he vanished again.

"That settles it!" muttered Uncle Fuller, with a long breath of relief, settling back into a more comfortable attitude. "The critter's got to the eend, an' the new bonanza's located to a dot! Now, durn ye, Bill Courtright! we'll see ef you won't pay fer this secret what you wouldn't fer t'other!"

CHAPTER XXII.

A RECKLESS SPECULATION.

UNCLE FULLER was right in his surmises so far as they concerned the existence of a cave near the point where the kidnapper had twice made his appearance, and it would have been hard to find a more cunning, yet simple place of concealment in that whole rocky range.

Passing over a tract of ground which was so stony as to retain not the faintest trace of human footsteps, the kidnapper stooped beneath a mass of pendent vines which covered a goodly portion of the face of a tall white rock. He then paused in what seemed to be a narrow path leading abruptly to the left, along the base of the rock, with an arch of foliage which reached to the ground on either hand as he faced the course of the narrow avenue.

Ahead in that direction appeared a gleam of moonlight, and had he chosen to follow the path, the kidnapper would have emerged into open sight, several yards away, from whence he might have continued his journey, unseen and unsuspected by the watching tramp, had he not already reached his present destination.

Lowering the form of the maiden to an easier position, the fellow carefully raised the lower edge of the leafy screen directly in front of the spot where he entered the curious pathway, then stooped and moved cautiously forward.

It was no miracle. By the light which he was not long in striking, one could see that the seemingly solid rock was hollow, or rather, that it rested over a comparative small hollow in the lower strata, which fact the friendly vines concealed from all but a very close search. Were it possible for any one to follow his trail to that spot, what more natural than for his enemies to believe he had taken the covered pathway? Who would think of looking for a den where all was apparently solid rock? And even if they should suspect such a thing, they would have to strike a spot not more than three feet in width or miss the opening altogether.

That this was not the first visit of the kidnapper to the den, was made sufficiently clear by his actions. Still holding the limp and lifeless form of the maiden on one arm, he struck a match and moved toward a certain portion of the den, aided by knowledge rather than the flickering light. He touched the match to a candle which was stuck by its own drippings to a point of rock, then gave a long breath of re-

lief as he lowered the girl to a rude pallet of blankets directly beneath the dim light.

"Lugging a bundle of concentrated sweetness is all very well, when a fellow is doing it to please his own appetite!" he muttered with a dry, hard laugh; "but when it is done to order, for another gentleman, it's a horse of a different color, thank you!"

Dropping to his knees beside the motionless form beneath the dim light, he felt of her pulse and closely examined her face, even pushing back the slightly reddened lids to gaze into her eyes. His motions grew a little hurried toward the last, as though his fears were awakened, but then he gave vent to a grunt of relief as he arose to his feet.

"It's all right, and the gold is good as earned, I reckon; though I did begin to think the dainty beauty had slipped up the golden stairs without giving any notice! The drug's handy in some cases, but I hate to use it in a hurry or so rudely!"

As he muttered these words, he turned to where a sponge, wrapped in a heavy cloth, lay on the floor of the cave. Picking them up, he passed out of the den and thus showed himself to the startled gaze of Uncle Fuller. Keenly scanning the route over which he had passed, the kidnapper withdrew into the covered pathway, passing along it until he emerged around the projecting shoulder of stone, flinging the sponge and cloth as far from him as its light weight would admit.

"It can do no harm, and may serve to throw the hounds off the right scent, if they do contrive to follow my trail this far," he muttered, with a grim smile, as he retraced his steps and re-entered the den.

With a flask of strong liquor, he bathed the face of the drugged maiden, only ceasing his efforts when the returning color and slight twitchings marked her face. And when Mora Burgess opened her eyes, they fell upon a masked face and thoroughly disguised form.

"Be wise, my dear, and no harm shall befall you," the kidnapper said, pronouncing each word with deliberate distinctness as though resolved that there should be no chance for misunderstanding between them, his gloved right hand hovering over her lips—a precaution which was not superfluous.

As the poor girl caught sight of that sable mask and felt those brilliant eyes glowing through the narrow slits upon her, she tried to shriek aloud for help. Swift as thought the gloved hand closed over her lips, effectually stifling all outcry in its birth, while the kidnapper hastily uttered:

"You are miles away from the hearing of any of your friends, but at the same time I don't care to hear you strain your charming voice. Promise that you will not cry out again, or I'll be under the disagreeable necessity of gagging you, my dear Miss Burgess!"

With his free hand, the rascal dangled a gag before her terrified gaze.

"You shall suffer no harm or insult at my hands, I swear by all that mankind holds holy. You are simply a hostage in my hands. When your father pays me the sum of money demanded, you will be restored to him safe and sound as when you were taken from him—if you are wise and don't make hard usage necessary to the safety of my precious neck! Be warned, now," he added, seriously, as he gradually relaxed his grip. "If you prove contrary, I will gag and bind you, sure!"

Curiously enough, there was something in the voice of the stranger that carried conviction of truth with it, and Mora ceased her vain struggles to free herself. The fellow removed his gloved hand, with a short laugh and approving nod.

"Good! you have the true pluck, after all, and I recognize the worthy daughter of a worthy sire!"

"What have I done to deserve such treatment?" came brokenly from the pale lips of the captive maiden. "Why have you committed such a vile outrage? How have we injured you, that you steal me away from home—that you—Heavens!" she gasped, her eyes dilating with horror as memory returned and she recalled the sight of Frederick Lyon falling like a corpse. "You murdered him!"

"Not a bit of it, my dear woman," was the cool retort. "Not a bit of it, unless his skull is thinner than an eggshell ought to be. Long before this the worthy mayor has recovered from the gentle love-tap I lent him, and has told his woeful tale to your father who—"

"Father! come to me!" sobbed Mora, breaking down at the mention of that title.

"Carefully, my lady!" warningly muttered the kidnapper, dangling the gag before her eyes. "Spare your breath, and you'll spare me a disagreeable duty. I've taken too long chances to run any unnecessary risks through a girl's hysterics."

His stern tones and sharp words caused Mora to choke down the cry which struggled up in her throat. Fearing worse treatment, she sought to recover her nerve, and succeeded far beyond the expectations of either herself or her captor.

"Now that's business!" the fellow nodded,

thrusting the gag into his pocket as he assumed a sitting position before the rude pallet on which his captive half-reclined, her shoulders supported by the stone wall. "Keep a stiff upper lip, and we'll get along famously together."

"For how long? What has fate in store for me?"

It was only by a desperate effort that Mora managed to ask these questions in a steady tone. Her brain seemed whirling round and round. She felt sick and unnerved by the fumes of the potent drug which had held her unconscious during that brief but toilsome journey, but she dared not give way to the weakness which assailed her.

"That depends wholly on your father," was the prompt reply, the kidnapper appearing ready, if not anxious, to make her comprehend the precise position she now filled. "If he proves prompt with his payments, you will soon be with him again in freedom. If you are held captive for more than four-and-twenty hours, you must blame him, not me."

"Take me back to him now—at once—and he will give you any sum you may demand!" cried Mora, her eyes lighting up with hope, her face regaining something of its usual color. "He will not haggle—he will pay you—"

"With a stout rope and a free swing on a footing of air—just so!" laughed the kidnapper, lightly.

"No—I pledge my word that you shall go free—that you shall have the gold you demand—only take me back to my poor old father!" pleaded the girl, sobbing.

But her heart sunk heavy as lead as the kidnapper slowly shook his head.

"You mean it, and I don't doubt but what you would do all that lay in your power to carry out the agreement, should I accept your proposal. But I know mankind better, perhaps, than you do. And I'm not hankering after death, thank you!"

"If father passed his word—and I swear to you I will obtain his solemn pledge before he knows who you really are—he would not break it even to save my life—the life that is dearer a thousand-fold to him than his own!" impetuously cried the maiden, her eyes glowing with offended pride at this insinuation of false dealing on the part of one whom she held so dear and honored so highly.

"He might keep it to the letter, yet break it in the spirit," lightly laughed the mask, watching her with eyes that seemed to glitter with admiration of her spirit. "He might pay me the money, bidding me go my ways in peace—but for how far? Who could promise a gang of the citizens wouldn't take it into their thick heads to waylay and discipline me a little? No, no, my dear lady! I know a scheme worth two of that and you will have to bring yourself to patient waiting until that scheme can work itself out as originally planned. Besides, if I wished ever so much to carry out your idea, my partners would interpose decided objections."

"Your partners?" echoed Mora, her face clouding again. "Then there are others? You are not alone in your—"

Villainy she would have said, but prudence caused her to bite off the word lest it anger her captor unnecessarily. He was smart enough to fill out the hiatus for himself.

"Speculation, you intended to say, I feel assured, lady," he laughed, half-mockingly. "Unfortunately for your powers of persuasion, I am not alone in this little business transaction. If I were—but let that flea stick by the wall. I owe a duty to my partners, as well as my own pocket, and that duty sternly bids me hold you a prisoner here until the ransom-money is fairly paid over to my mates."

As though to escape her further importunities, the masked man rose and passed out of the den. He stole silently out through the leafy screen, keenly sweeping the space before him to make sure no one was in pursuit. And then, all unconscious of the fact that Uncle Fuller was greedily watching his actions, he once more retreated into the den.

Taking a seat on the stone floor near where Mora was stationed, he lit his pipe and while smoking, talked freely.

"As a man who takes pure business for his motto, my dear Miss Burgess, I think it is no more than right that there should be a perfect understanding between you and me, if only to avert any little unpleasantness which might easily arise were you to attempt an escape, led thereto by a fear of worse than is intended for you."

"In the first place, then, I am only one of four men who have more spirit and wit than gold between us. Yesterday, we were five—but of that, anon."

"We came to Colorado as honest treasure-hunters. We spent our little all in prospecting for the bonanza which we were fated to find above, not under the surface of the earth. We lived on a crust, and then when that was gone, we starved; until all the romance faded out of honesty. Then we resolved to feast, instead."

"We put our heads together, and consulted. We came to the conclusion that if we each one had five thousand dollars as a starter, we

would go back to civilization and try our fortunes there. And as we studied how we could make that amount, a flash of true genius pointed toward you and Miss Lyon. We would gain gold through beauty."

"We intended to try our luck yesterday in case you fair ladies came out to witness the fire-fight. Miss Lyon was injured and remained at home. You came, and the one on whom the attempt devolved by lot, made the effort, and met his death. It was a gallant stroke for fortune, and deserved better success. Still, his survivors were not disheartened, and the next chance was given to me. You see how well I have improved it."

"Before this, one of my partners will have fastened our terms to the door of your house, and in some manner safe to himself, called the attention of your parent to it. Our terms are plainly stated. To recover you he has only to pay out the comparatively insignificant sum of \$30,000. Though we decided on five thousand apiece, each dead member will cost Jeter Burgess double that sum. When the sum demanded is paid and safely carried off, then you will be restored to your parent. If, to cover all contingencies, Jeter Burgess should prove obstinate—if he should try to rescue you without meeting our terms—well, it is said that the gods love those who die young," slowly added the mask, with chilling significance.

Mora made no reply, though she felt her face turning pale at the veiled threat. The mask nodded approvingly, then said:

"I see you understand, so no more on that point. As for your treatment, in the mean time, it will depend largely on yourself. You have a fair bed. There is food and water. You can keep the light burning if you choose. You can walk, talk or sleep, as best suits your temper; but if you try to cry aloud or to leave this den, I will gag and bind you hand and foot."

"To give you as much freedom as lies in my power, I will keep guard outside; but at the first attempt to break orders, I will come back—remember that!"

Without another word, he arose and left the den.

Mora continued motionless after his departure, thinking deeply, her poor brain in a confused whirl. Strange and momentous events had so crowded upon her of late that she could hardly believe it was not all a dream. And with hands tightly clasping her forehead, she sat there in the dim light, striving to clear her brain, to see her way through the perplexing tangle, to decide upon the proper course to pursue.

Was it strange that, remembering what had occurred since the dawning to that eventful Fourth of July, her thoughts recurred to the gallant young stranger who had so promptly risked his life in her behalf? Was it strange that a warm glow chased the pallor from her cheek, that a bright light filled her eyes, that hope sprang up anew in her heart as she thought of Frank Lightfoot? Or that she murmured half-aloud:

"He is there! He will learn—and he will lose no time in coming to my aid! I will not despair with two such good and true friends—with my father and my—"

Was the word that trembled on her tongue *lover*? If so, it was only uttered deep down in her own heart.

Then—how long a time elapsed before it came Mora knew not—the sharp report of a revolver rent the air. And closely following it, she caught the sounds of a hollow groan—of quick, rattling, wheezy breathings, as though they came from a throat which was fast filling up with blood.

For a brief space she was frozen with horror; all about her seemed to reel and dance and turn the color of fresh blood. Then she started forward, only to shrink back with a gasping cry of disappointment and shuddering aversion!

CHAPTER XXII.

UNCLE FULLER'S BONANZA PETERS OUT.

WHEN that second appearance of the masked man convinced Uncle Fuller that the kidnapper must have some sort of hiding-place in or beneath the white, vine-clad rock, the first thought of the tramp was how he could turn this discovery to his pecuniary advantage. Believing as he did that the maiden abducted was none other than Cleonice Lyon, he fancied his fingers were already clutching the gold which the mayor had that day so emphatically declined to share with him.

"Ef he don't pony up, and mighty ginorous at that, durned ef he cain't fin' out what your Uncle Fuller knows by his own Parnin'! 'Tain't a grunt they'll git out o' the ole man, 'less they fill his trough chuck-full o' yaller-boys, coaxes him to eat, all they knows how—not a baby grunt, even!"

He was already thinking of crawling out of range of the den, then making all haste to Independence City with his news, when a most disagreeable suspicion struck him. Suppose the

kidnapper should be making only a temporary halt? Suppose he should take his captive and resume his flight while he, Uncle Fuller, was absent on his mission? Suppose the father should come to an amicable agreement with the one who brought him such momentous tidings; suppose he, Uncle Fuller, was to guide a party back to the rescue, only to find the nest empty?

"They'd string your Uncle Fuller up so high that the bluebirds'd build nests into the two years of him! They'd sw'ar the ole man was playin' roots onto 'em, sart'in sure!" he mused, thoughtfully rubbing his stubbly chin.

Uncle Fuller was a coward, but where there was so much at stake as in the present case, he felt justified in running some risks. And in hopes of learning whether or no the kidnapper had really reached the end of his journey for the night, the tramp cautiously stole closer to the spot where he had twice seen the masked figure vanish from his eager view.

He kept one hand on his heavy revolver, resolved to kill rather than be killed, should the occasion arise; but just then the bold abductor was busy inside, revealing his fortune-making schemes, and Uncle Fuller reached the leafy screen without the occurrence of aught to alarm him. Once there, he was guided by the indistinct sound of human voices, and thus kept from turning aside into the false pathway.

Almost the first words Uncle Fuller heard convinced him that he had little to dread on the score which had given him such serious uneasiness; but instead of instantly beating a retreat, as prudence dictated, he lingered there, eager to learn all, a true eavesdropper.

He was still listening when the kidnapper rose and declared his intention of keeping watch and ward outside of the den. He beat a hasty retreat then, but the unexpected emergency proved too much for him. He was afraid the masked man would be at his heels before he could regain his former cover, and in his agitation he crouched down close to the tall rock where the pendent vines lent their shadows to the gloom, trembling in every limb, holding his breath as the muscular figure of the kidnapper came into full view.

It was plain enough that the latter had heard nothing to awaken his suspicions, for he carelessly filled his pipe as he stood in full view, slowly scanning the waste of rocks and shrubbery which lay spread before him. Then, lighting his pipe, the stranger chose a seat where he was partially in the shade, and composed himself as though for the night—with his face turned directly toward the spot where Uncle Fuller crouched not twenty feet away!

Worse than that. Uncle Fuller to his horror, saw the line of bright moonlight slowly creeping nearer his hiding-place. Half an hour at the utmost, and his crouching figure would be fully revealed to the gaze of the kidnapper, unless he could manage to beat a retreat to a safer location.

It was ticklish work in the face and almost beneath the nose of an enemy, but there was only one other alternative, scarcely less disagreeable to the tramp. Not that he had any conscientious scruples against blood-letting, if it could only be done without too great risk to his own precious person, and as he resolved to make the attempt to crawl out of the dangerous predicament into which his curiosity had placed himself, Uncle Fuller held his revolver, thumb on hammer, finger on trigger, ready for instant use in case of necessity.

Scarcely had he made a motion backward when the kidnapper suddenly sprang to his feet, and believing that he was discovered, Uncle Fuller flung up his weapon and fired, then leaped to his feet and broke into hasty flight!

More by chance than through good aim or steadiness, the bullet found its billet, and with a gurgling moan, the daring speculator in human flesh clapped both hands to his breast, reeled like a drunken man, then fell heavily against the vine-clad rock.

Uncle Fuller like most fugitives, ran with beard on shoulder, and saw the masked wretch fall headlong. Reason told him that there was nothing further to dread from the enemy, but his native cowardice made him very cautious about returning, and when he did retrace his steps, it was with cocked pistol covering the prostrate figure. Nor would he have ventured so much, only for his fear lest the maiden attempt to escape, and thus endanger his latest bonanza.

A single glance satisfied him that the kidnapper was beyond harming any mortal, and with crafty schemes surging back and forth through his unscrupulous brain, he hastily stripped off the black hood with its mask attached, and donned it himself, together with the heavy coat which the stricken wretch had worn. And it was the sight of Uncle Fuller thus disguised that caused Mora Burgess to stagger back with a wild cry of mingled terror and despair.

"You have murdered him!" she gasped, in her agitation not noticing the difference between the stumpy bummer and the tall, well-formed stranger or detecting the fraud. "My father—you have killed him as he came to the aid of his poor child!"

Never a word spoke Uncle Fuller, knowing that his coarse tones and incorrect manner of speech would certainly betray his imposition. With rude hands he bore the terrified girl back upon the pallet, then slipped the gag between her teeth, tying it securely behind her neck. Then, feeling less need of haste, the unscrupulous rascal deliberately bound her hand and foot, thoroughly testing each knot before leaving it. And when assured that it was beyond her power to release herself, he left the cave and paused once more beside the kidnapper.

A hasty inspection satisfied him that the fellow was dead, and replacing the disguise he lifted the body in his arms, partly carrying, partly dragging it to a narrow rift among the rocks hard by.

"Good enough berryin' fer p'izen gal-stealers like you!" he muttered, as he dropped the carcass into the cleft, tossing a few pieces of dry brush over the corpse, finally rolling a few heavy rocks down into the narrow cleft. "Mebbe they'll find you when they come fer the gal, but so long's the ole man holds out to sw'ar he never knowed nothin' 'bout it, or how come ye so, they cain't prove no lie onto him! Wouldn't be no need, ef your Uncle Fuller was one o' the tony critters, but bein' as he's on'y a pore ole cuss, mebbe they'd try to make it out murder, ef on'y to git shet o' payin' his price!"

Chuckling at his own shrewdness, Uncle Fuller slowly retraced his steps, scraping up dust to cover over all spots of blood, then turning his face once more toward Independence City.

"Ef the critter told the gal the truth, mebbe it won't work so mighty fine," he muttered, a little uneasily, despite his own arguments; "but I reckon he was lyin' 'bout his hexin' so many pardners. Ef not, whar is they? Why wasn't they nigh to len' him a hand totin' the bun'le o' sweetness? The critter was lyin', dead sure!"

All of the actions detailed in the last few chapters, had consumed time, and when Uncle Fuller gained the plateau on his return trip, day was just beginning to dawn. And as he peered down upon the mining-camp, he could see that its citizens were rushing hastily to and fro, in evident excitement.

Nervously, for right well he realized that he was playing with dangerously edged tools, Uncle Fuller descended the steep and moved toward the town. He had almost gained it before his approach was detected, but then a wild shout arose, and as the tramp hesitated, half-turning to flee for dear life, Aristabulus Boythorn rushed forward and caught him by the throat, shaking him much as a terrier might a rat, vociferating:

"The dirty whelp!" he spluttered, punctuating each sentence with a vigorous shake that seemed to loosen every tooth in the unhappy bummer's head. "Don't I know him? Didn't I see him with my own two ears? Didn't I hear him sw'ar he'd git even ef it took a hind leg? Ef I didn't, honey, I'm a howlin' liar right from the factory! Jes' smell o' his fingers, somebody whar's got more nose than sense, an' see ef he didn't do the dirty trick! Ow-wow! you on-gracious critter!"

Wild and incoherent though this charge was, it was quite sufficient to set the blood of the already highly excited citizens on fire, and in one savage roar there arose the still more ferocious yell for human blood! In the mad rush which followed, both the Barnacle and his captive were hurled to the ground and trampled upon, each man striving to fasten his grip on the supposed guilty being. Wild with terror Uncle Fuller forgot his bonanza—forgot all else save that his precious life was sadly endangered—and screamed at the top of his voice:

"Let up, an' I'll squeal! Let up—ur you'll never—see the gal—agin'!"

"Let up, boys!" came the half-smothered tones of Aristabulus Boythorn, from beneath that mass of struggling humanity. "I got the p'izen critter too fast to skin!"

Like magic the mountain of flesh rolled back on all sides, revealing the worthy Barnacle still clutching the unworthy Argonaut, both of them being covered with dirt and blood, little better than a twin heap of rags.

"Git a rope an' choke the truth out o' him!" shouted one of the most excited citizens.

That was enough to set the mad fire blazing again, and the dangerous crowd closed around the two men, death in their eyes, their faces, their every word, look and action. And death to the craven wretch who cowered beneath the honest grasp of the Barnacle, had not aid arrived just then.

"Out of the way, men!" cried a clear, stern voice, and then like a human catapult, Frank Lightfoot forced a passage through the crowd, hurling strong men to either side as readily as though they were children. "No lynch law here, until the fellow has a chance to speak for himself. If you ask what says so, here it is!"

As he spoke, Lightfoot tapped a gold badge which suddenly made its appearance on his breast, then drew a revolver with his right hand, while the other closed like a vise on the arm of Uncle Fuller. That mark of authority was sufficient, and as Jeter Burgess and

Frederick Lyon pressed to the side of the detective, the wild tumult ceased and for the moment all danger of lynching was past.

But Uncle Fuller had been too roughly handled, too thoroughly frightened to think just then of making terms with his captors. Trembling like a leaf he clung to Lightfoot, begging to be taken to a place of safety.

"I'll tell it all, gents: 'deed your Uncle Fuller will!" he whined, a sickening, degraded object. "I wasn't to blame—I on'y done what I think was right, an' you didn't ort—"

"Mora—my child!" cried Jeter Burgess, his face white as a corpse, but his eyes glowing with a fire that fell little short of insanity. "What have you done with her?"

"I never teched her, nur I ain't see'd her!" declared the tramp; and in this he was perfectly sincere, strange as it may appear after what has been detailed of that night's work.

From the first he had taken the abducted maiden for Cleonice Lyon, and though he had since seen Mora face to face, it was while so excited by his narrow escape from the kidnapper that he had failed to notice the difference in identity.

With a hasty word to Jeter Burgess, Frank Lightfoot led the tramp aside, and by dint of questioning him, he learned the version which Uncle Fuller had resolved to give from the outset. That he, Uncle Fuller, while lurking in the hills, afraid to return to town lest the pumping discipline be renewed, had discovered a man carrying a woman, and suspecting something was wrong, remembering the attempted abduction of the past night, he dogged the stranger until satisfied he had run him to earth. Then he made the best of his way back to town, satisfied that the news he bore would prove his safeguard.

"An' them critters hed to pile onto the ole man an' nigh 'bout tromple him to hog feed!" the Argonaut groaned, but with a side glance into the face of his captor to learn how far his story was believed.

"If you have told the truth—if you can guide us to the place where you left that rascal and Miss Burgess, you shall have ample pay with which to salve your hurts, never fear," said Lightfoot, soothingly. "Where was it? How far from town? In which direction?"

Uncle Fuller, slowly recovering his wonted composure, now that he felt assured he would be rewarded rather than lynched, paused before replying, trying to see some method by which he might hold back his information until he could make a more positive bargain, with Jeter Burgess, since it was his child that had been stolen.

"Tain't so easy to say, boss," he whined, dubiously. "Not but I kin show the way thar," he added quickly, as he saw the ominous frown contract the brows of the detective and felt that warning grasp tighten on his arm. "But the ole man ain't got no head fer 'scription—'deed he ain't, now!"

"Lead the way, then!" cried Jeter Burgess, who had drawn within earshot, unable longer to control his anxiety. "Take me to my child, and name your own reward! Though it be half my fortune, I'll never think it wasted in such a cause!"

"Done!" quickly uttered the tramp, turning toward the detective and spluttering. "You hearn the offer, boss? I didn't ax nothin', did I? He made the offer free, didn't he?"

"We all heard," sternly uttered Frederick Lyon. "I'll be his surety that your demands are satisfied in full—and I pledge my word to match his generosity, if you can show clean hands in this affair. But if they are stained—may the Lord have mercy on your guilty soul, for we'll not!"

Uncle Fuller shrunk away from that stern voice and still sterner threats; but he believed he had completely covered his tracks, and his native impudence soon returned. With a vague belief that were he to clearly describe the spot where the kidnapper had taken his prize, it would in some manner betray his agency in the death of the masked man, Uncle Fuller persisted in declaring his inability to do more than guide the rescuing-party to the place, and without too clearly betraying his purpose, he evaded the question put to him by Frank Lightfoot, who wanted to divide the party so as to surround the den before the kidnapper could possibly suspect their aims.

He finally dispatched two separate squads of citizens, which were to close in from opposite sides when they heard an agreed-upon signal; then the tramp led the remainder up and across the plateau.

Vaguely suspecting treachery, Frank Lightfoot kept close to the side of his guide. Jeter Burgess and Frederick Lyon also bore him company, until just as they were passing close alongside a deep cleft in the rocks. Then—just how it happened, none of the others could possibly see or explain—the tramp tripped and reeled on the very verge of the abyss!

A wild screech escaped his lips, and flinging out his arms, he caught hold of Frederick Lyon, who was nearest to him. There was a brief but desperate struggle, but ere any hand could reach them, both men fell over into the gulch!

CHAPTER XXIV.

A VILLAIN UNMASKED.

So sudden and unexpected was the terrible mishap that of them all, Frank Lightfoot alone thrust out a hand to save the two men, but vainly. Indeed, as he sprang forward to the rescue he came dangerously near following them in that deadly plunge down upon the ragged rocks with which the bottom of the gulch was lined. He swayed perilously on the very verge, then maintained his balance, gazing breathlessly down at the sickening sight.

One wild screech, rather than cry, came back from the doomed wretches; then the dull, shivering thud which told of broken bones and mutilation!

"Look for a trail to get down!" hurriedly cried the detective, after that one shuddering glance. "If there's a spark of life left in them we must use it to learn more of her—of Miss Burgess. Make haste—bring brandy and water!"

While uttering these hasty words, Frank Lightfoot was unbuckling and letting drop his belt of arms and casting aside all incumbrances. For one moment he stood looking down the almost perpendicular wall, then leaped from solid footing, his toes catching on a narrow ledge of rock barely wide enough for him to gain strength and steadiness sufficient for another leap—this time to the top of a bending, stunted tree. The brittle twigs snapped and slipped through his fingers, letting him slide down them until he dropped off, with only the rocks below to break his fall. Luckily he had crossed half the distance before the tree failed him, and then he struck on his feet in an erect position. Even then the fall jarred him severely, though he was in no wise disabled.

He hastened to the spot where the two luckless wretches lay and bent over them. Almost rudely he dragged the body of Frederick Lyon aside, heedless of the faint moan which came from his lips, thinking only of the tramp who had been underneath in the frightful fall, and of the secret which he alone could solve. But there his labors ceased. Even his wild hopes could not survive that terrible spectacle. Those lips were forever closed, and Uncle Fuller would never again speculate in dubious "bonanzas."

Pale, stern-faced they found him when, having discovered a way of descending to the bottom of the gulch, half a dozen of the rescuing-party came up. Jeter Burgess and Aristabulus Boythorn were among them, and a half-stifed groan broke from the lips of the father as Frank Lightfoot slowly shook his head. No need of words. That silent action told him all.

Like an echo came a moan from the lips of Frederick Lyon and this sound of suffering and life awakened all the instincts of the one-time doctor.

Half an hour later, Frederick Lyon was restored to consciousness. He lay partially supported by a bundle of coats and garments contributed by the citizens. He was gazing steadily up into the pale, haggard face which bent over him. And his voice, though still faint, sounded strangely calm and strong to those who knew the whole truth.

"What's the verdict, partner? No mincing, if you please. In one word, will I pull through?"

Jeter Burgess slowly shook his head, his eyes growing dim with tears, for he had grown very fond of this strong man.

For an instant that bold gaze faltered, something like a shudder crept over the terribly shattered frame; but the weakness was only momentary in its duration, at least to the perception of those who looked on.

"How long do you give me? a month—a week—a day?" he deliberately asked, shortening his periods rapidly as Jeter Burgess shook his head gravely, then adding in a tone that was sharp with irritation: "An hour, then? That much, at least?"

"It may be an hour—it may even be a day—but it may come at any moment when we least expect it," brokenly replied Jeter Burgess, pressing the hand of his partner, as though to give him silent sympathy.

But his hand was thrown aside, with a short, hard laugh that sounded little like the voice of a dying man.

"So be it, then! I'll die as I've lived, a man of sand! No whining and canting—give me a flask, somebody—give me brandy and plenty of it!"

Jeter Burgess silently nodded, and rising to his feet, he stood with folded arms gazing upon the face of the doomed.

Eagerly, greedily, Frederick Lyon caught at the nearest flask and almost drained it dry at a single draught. Flinging that aside, and grasping another, holding it tightly to his breast with his one sound hand, he glanced around until his eyes rested on the bowed form of Frank Lightfoot.

"That infernal tramp—what of him? Surely he didn't get clear, after all? He won't live where a decent man dies?"

"He is dead," was the grave reply. "His body formed a cushion for yours to fall on. You owe your life to him."

"Score one good deed for Uncle Fuller, then!"

with a short, husky laugh that sounded far from natural. "It gives me a chance to square accounts with my creditors, at any rate. The dirty scoundrel! I didn't think he was so quick—I thought I could trip him up and send him to death without even his suspecting me! Bah! you start and stare as though you thought my brain was giving way—but not so. I speak the truth. I came with you expressly to stop that scoundrel's tongue, and I have done so—though you say 'twill cost my life."

The men stared at the wild speaker as though unable to comprehend his meaning—all but Frank Lightfoot. With one swift stride he gained the side of the fallen mine-owner, his blue eyes ablaze as he bent low and grated:

"You killed him on purpose? You wanted to bury the secret of her hiding-place forever? Curse you, wretch! speak your meaning clear, or I'll tear the truth from your lips, though your heart comes with it! Speak! where is Mora Burgess?"

Weak, panting, seemingly exhausted by that wild outburst, Frederick Lyon lay looking up, meeting that savage gaze without a sign of fear. Indeed, there was a feeble glow of triumph in his eyes. Then he lifted the second flask to his lips and took a long draught before speaking.

"It's plain enough that her image is painted on your heart, Sir Detective, no matter where her dainty person is," he mocked, with renewed fire. "Why ask me her whereabouts?"

"Because you have betrayed your hand!" was the quick retort. "Why else were you so resolved to kill the tramp, thus destroying the only one who could guide us to her place of confinement? But you shall speak out and—"

"I will speak out, but it will be in my own time and in the order to which I see fit to assign it," was the sharp answer. "I do know where Mora Burgess, as you call her, is hidden!"

A sharp cry came in interruption from the pallid lips of Jeter Burgess, and the bereaved parent flung himself beside the mine-owner, his voice so shaken as to scarcely be recognizable to those who knew it best under ordinary circumstances.

"Tell me—tell me where to seek for her, Fred! Why have you done this? Why have you torn my poor child from me—from one who never injured you—who loved you like a brother?"

"Not a word until I have your sacred oaths to what I demand! Give me all the liquor I ask for to keep up the fire until the last word is spoken. Keep all hands off me, and when the accounts are fairly squared, suffer the devils to take me after their own fashion. Swear, or I die with closed lips—and then find Mora if you can!"

"We swear—I take the oath for them all!" cried Frank Lightfoot, forgetting everything else in his dread lest the precious secret forever escape them.

"Good enough! I'll trust you, for you are a man, even though your trade is an accursed one! Place the bottles where I can reach them, then fall back to a respectful distance. If a dog's future awaits me, at least I'll be a king now!"

Shudderingly the little group fell back, yielding their flasks to Frank Lightfoot who placed them in the position indicated by the wretch. Even his strong nerves were somewhat shaken by that worse than raillery. He seemed to be waiting on a veritable demon rather than an ordinary man!

"Your time on earth is short, Frederick Lyon," he said, gravely, as he took Jeter Burgess by the arm, and with gentle force led him back from the side of the helpless wretch. "Do not add the curses of those who once loved and respected you to your punishment. Do justice to this poor man ere it is forever too late!"

"Never fear! he shall have justice, as far as that quality lies in my power!" the mine-owner uttered with a short, metallic laugh, as he once more drank freely of the strong liquor, which alone served to keep him up. "But before that, let me clear up my own record. It was my tools that stole Mora away—who keep her now, safely for my claiming!"

Despite all that had gone before, this announcement fell with the force of a thunder-clap on his auditors, and they uttered cries and ejaculations of wonder and aversion, while Frederick Lyon lay glaring upon them with a Satanic pleasure imprinted upon his death-marked countenance. He seemed to find as much satisfaction in extorting their hatred and disgust as he had formerly felt in winning their respect and homage.

"It is true—every word I utter, my dear and noble subjects!" he added, laughing with a ferocity that seemed increased by his bodily helplessness. "Where you worshiped me as a saint, I was a sinner! You thought me just, honest, a paragon of virtue; instead, I was—just like the rest of you—a lying hypocrite, a thief, a true child of the devil!"

"He is crazy!" muttered Jeter Burgess, a gleam of pity coming into his haggard face. "He knows not what he says, and it is a pity to listen to him!"

"You lie, my honest partner!" sharply retorted the crippled wretch, his eyes glowing

redly, either from insanity or the copious draughts of liquor which he had taken. "Not even King Death can trip up the steady brain I have so carefully trained through all these years! I know what I am saying. I choose to make a change in the original programme, and die as I really am, not as the world thinks me. And first—listen!"

"I am rich, but I coveted more wealth. As the first step, I resolved to get the Liberty mine wholly into my hands, and that without paying the price I knew my honest partner would demand for his share. How to do this? He carried one soft spot in his heart, and I resolved to touch him on that.

"My plans were all arranged weeks ago. I imported men to do my work, thus keeping suspicion from falling on me. I told them what they were to swear to, in the face of death, should the scheme run crookedly. Never mind just what my instructions were; you can guess at them from the notice you received last night, Jeter Burgess!"

"It was one of my tools who lost his life in trying to abduct Mora, at the fire-fight—thank you, Frank Lightfoot! And that same night, when the failure was complete, I gave the other fellow his orders. These he carried out last night. He it was who knocked me down and bore away the fair maiden. I felt like a dead man, according to the programme; but then came an act which I had nothing to do in arranging, though I more than suspect that heap of carrion!" with a baleful glance toward the spot where the mangled corpse of Uncle Fuller lay hidden beneath a cover of clothing.

"I heard the tramp of footsteps, and hastened to rise. I had not time to turn my head, before I was knocked down, this time really insensible. How long I lay there, I knew not, but when I woke up, there was no person to be seen. And then I concluded to carry out the original plan.

"I spent an hour longer out in the night, then came to you two worthies. And doctor though you claim to be, partner of mine, I threw dust into your eyes most beautifully! All the time you were laboring to restore me, I was laughing in my sleeve at you for a pitiful dupe! I was playing for more time—to let my tool get safely to his hiding-place, for one thing; for another, to gain a chance to post that notice where you would be sure to find it, without suspecting me of having a finger in the pie."

A hollow groan escaped the pallid lips of the father as he fought against his heart-sickening impatience, but Frederick Lyon only smiled in a ghastly manner as he took another drink.

"Patience, my honest partner, for yet a little longer," he said, mockingly. "I promised that justice should be done you, and I am one who never goes back on his word—without good and sufficient consideration.

"It was my purpose to extort this sum of money from you, by threatening the life of the fair Mora. On its payment, she was to be restored to you with strict observance of the bargain; but at the earliest opportunity that offered, the exploit was to be repeated time and again, until you were stripped of every dollar you could raise!"

"Devil!" gasped the father, his indignation getting the upper hand of his grief at this display of bitter malignance. "What had I ever done to you to deserve such wrong?"

"In part, my dear partner, you possessed money which I lusted for, to say naught of your share in the Liberty mine. But cease your untimely grumblings, unless you wish me to shut my mouth as tight as an oyster, and die as dumb."

"I will answer for his silence," said Frank Lightfoot, taking the arm of the almost insane mine-owner. "Go on. You have not told all. Be quick, else the grave may take the rest of your life history."

Outwardly the young detective was the only cool and composed member of the entire party. Inwardly he was being consumed by a raging fire that glowed redly through his eyes.

"That was my first plan, and one to which I religiously adhered until a little after noon, yesterday," resumed Frederick Lyon, his voice growing perceptibly weaker as he went on.

"Then it was too late to notify my man of the alteration, so I let his portion of the scheme go on as at first intended. According to the original programme, the fair Mora was only to be held for ransom, but as I hinted, yesterday I learned something that made her role promise to be one of far greater importance. Instead of restoring her to you the same as she was taken, I resolved to send her back a wife!"

Frank Lightfoot suffered a low cry to escape his lips, but he almost instantly conquered his hot indignation, aided in this by the necessity of restraining Jeter Burgess, whose anger momentarily overpowered his fears.

Frederick Lyon watched them with an evil glitter in his dark eyes, laughing with a mocking sneer as he spoke again:

"That touches you, my fine bloodhound, does it? Well, I wish you joy of your fine and dainty bride—when you get her! A fitting match it will prove, and—"

He had gone too far. Human nature could

endure no more, and as an angry, ominous muttering broke from the lips of the citizens, Frank Lightfoot loosened the mine-owner who sprang forward, shaking his clinched hands in the face of the wretch.

"Confess—tell where my child is hidden, you wretch, or with my own hands I will fit a noose around your neck!"

"You have broken the compact, now take the consequences!" laughed the crippled villain, unflinchingly, his eyes all on fire. "Find your child when you can! She will die where she's now concealed, for so I ordered it! My man will slit her dainty throat, when he learns of my death. Now hang me if you dare!"

With a cry of horror the father shrunk back, covering his face with his hands, while Frederick Lyon cried huskily:

"Look at him, Frank Apperley! Look at the craven cur, who tries to conceal the brand of Cain with which his forehead is marked! Look at him, and recall the sacred oath you took with your hand on the lifeless bosom of your father—a vow which you must keep, or be held forever accursed! Look at him well, I say, for in him you behold William Courtright, the long-sought-for assassin of his brother Thomas and his brother's wife! I, dying as I know myself, charge him thus!"

CHAPTER XXV.

HOW THE VOW WAS KEPT.

"HURRAH fer burray! They've got her—they've got her!"

The excited cry came from among the party on the top of the gulch, just as Frederick Lyon denounced Jeter Burgess as the long-sought-for assassin. It could have but the one interpretation, and as those below saw the men above turn and dash away at full speed, they forgot all else in their own mad haste to gain the upper regions.

Led on by Frank Lightfoot, Jeter Burgess scrambled up the steep trail and sprang out upon the level, a glad cry escaping his lips as he beheld the figure of his daughter running toward him with outstretched hands!

It was a happy meeting, and more than one eye among the silent witnesses grew dim and watery. But not for long. Aristabulus Boythorn could restrain himself no longer, and throwing his battered felt high into the air, he howled:

"It's blow off steam, or bu'st my b'ilers! Whoop'er up, pards! Three times three for the angel-come-back-ag'in, an' then a be-ole squeal fer Independence City—with a big S!"

That was sufficient. With the voice of the Barnacle—somewhat wheezy and broken-winded, to be sure—as a guide, the citizens made the very hills ring and echo with their enthusiastic cheers until Mora blushed, and laughed through her tears of joy—until the crippled, death-doomed sinner in the gulch below ground his teeth in impotent fury and hatred as he rightly divined their meaning.

And one by one the citizens had to file past and shake the hand of the one who was lost but who was found again. It may have been accident, but Frank Lightfoot was the last one in that little procession, and if he held the hand of the now furiously blushing girl a little longer than any of the others, who shall blame him? He was keeping no other waiting.

The marvel was one which admitted of a brief explanation.

Uncle Fuller had not slain the kidnapper outright, and though buried, the fellow came back to life again. Luckily for him, the bottom of the cleft into which Uncle Fuller dropped his supposed corpse, was so narrow that the heavy stones rolled on top of the brush as additional cover, wedged themselves between the two walls before striking his body. And when his senses returned to him, all he had to do was to crawl out at one end of the cliff.

He managed to crawl back to the den, and feeling that his death was certain unless he had speedy help, he released Mora from her bonds, after extorting a promise that she would send him succor the instant she found her friends. And she was hardly clear of the den before she espied one division of the rescuing party, to whom she appealed.

Jeter Burgess examined the wound of the kidnapper, whose face, like that of his fellow-rascal of the fire fight, was wholly unknown to the curious crowd, and pronounced it serious but not necessarily fatal. A litter was formed, and on it the half-unconscious wretch was borne to Independence City.

In his company was conveyed Frederick Lyon, now lying in a stupor which more nearly resembled a drunken slumber than death.

Arm in arm walked Mora and her father, their faces bright and happy as though a shadow of sin or crime had never crossed their pathway, conversing in low tones.

Behind them walked Frank Lightfoot, his face dark and grave, his eyes showing what a bitter struggle there was going on within his heart and brain. Only once the eyes of detective and mine-owner met during that walk, and then the former soberly nodded in answer to that appealing look. It asked him to delay his blow for the moment, and Frank Lightfoot granted the mute prayer.

But he never lost sight of the mine-owner for a moment, until they were alone together in that little room where only the sudden appearance of Frederick Lyon had saved Jeter Burgess from arrest as a murderer. Then in cold, hard tones the detective tapped the mine-owner on the shoulder, saying:

"William Courtright, I arrest you in the name of the law for willful and premeditated murder!"

Instead of flinching and begging for mercy, Jeter Burgess grasped his hand and pressed it cordially, smiling genially as he made reply:

"Of course you could do no less, after the charge made by that consummate scoundrel whom I once called friend and believed an honorable gentleman, but—"

"I would have done the same had he died without uttering a word," coldly interposed the detective. "I felt sure you were my man from the very first, but to give you every possible chance to clear yourself, I waited until I could tell you the whole black tale of a blacker past. You betrayed yourself at a score or more points."

"As the friend, the one-time suitor for the hand of Edna Irving—never as her foul assassin!" the mine-owner cried in broken tones, tears coming into his dark eyes. "As God in Heaven hears me, Frank Apperley, I am not William Courtright!"

When that interview ended, both men emerged from the room with grave faces. Jeter Burgess had produced such proofs of his truth as nearly satisfied the detective of his innocence, and declared so solemnly that he would be able to prove his identity as Jeter Burgess, were he granted a little time to gather evidence and documents, that the detective agreed to a truce for the time asked.

It was no hard duty, Frank Lightfoot found. He loved Mora Burgess so ardently that he was only too eager to catch at a chance of clearing the name and honor of her father.

They had scarcely left the room before a message came to them from Frederick Lyon. He had been conveyed to his own house. Mora going ahead to keep Cleonice from suffering too abrupt a shock. She was with her poor friend now, who only knew that her parent had been injured in a fall while searching for the missing maiden; she knew naught of the damning confession which the injured man had made.

The summons was instantly obeyed, the two men entering the chamber of the dying man arm in arm. His haggard countenance lighted up with an evil glow as he saw this.

"You have kept your vow?" he muttered, huskily, to Frank.

Was it the professional instinct, of which we hear so much? Or was it a whisper from the dead and gone detective that impelled Frank Lightfoot to step forward, lay one hand on the shoulder of the mine-owner and say sternly:

"I keep it thus! I arrest you for the murder of Thomas and Edna Courtright!"

With a low, gasping cry, the mutilated wretch shrunk away from that touch, his face filled with horror—but it lasted only an instant—lasted only long enough to condemn him in the minds and hearts of those two witnesses. Then, with a low, mocking laugh, he gasped:

"Prove it! I know it must come hard for even a bloodhound to arrest the father of her whom he hopes to win and wear, but you can't help yourself! Remember your oath! Break it—if you—dare!"

The effort was too great. The speaker choked, then fell back, seemingly dying.

But the end was not yet. His powers of resistance were fairly marvelous, and all the rest of that day he lay seemingly at the point of death, only to regain a feverish strength as nightfall came. And then, pale-faced, stern, his blue eyes glowing steadily, Frank Lightfoot summoned several citizens to the chamber where the Mayor of Independence City lay dying.

And as the fever raged more fiercely, the tongue of the criminal was loosened, and the intricacies of a double life were laid bare.

No longer Frederick Lyon, but Francis Fleury, he tore the veil from the past and unconsciously proved the innocence of the man whom he seemed resolved should hang for a crime of which he was wholly innocent.

No need to reproduce his wild ravings in their entirety. Sufficient has been shadowed forth, in these pages for the truth to be readily guessed. Enough that Francis Fleury, in his lust for gold, had been the one to sow those vile and degrading rumors which in the end drove Edna Courtright to take that hasty trip to the wild West, where she met her doom. And it was Francis Fleury, slightly but sufficiently disguised, for there had been but scant intercourse between the two branches of the family, who bore Edna Courtright company on her trip; it was his eyes that watched the impulsive action of William Courtright, his voice that secretly encouraged the spirit of Cain; and it was Francis Fleury who acted the role of a physician at the inquest which followed the tragedy.

Nor was this all. From triumphant mutterings, the dying wretch passed to wilder curses and threats. And in the midst of these, he unconsciously cleared the memory of the man whom he had branded with the sign of death. In his insane moments he lived over that frightful night—he dealt the blows and fired the shots that cut short the lives of those who stood between him and fortune!

Then, sinking rapidly, he died in silence, unconscious of the coming death.

Cleonice never knew of the frightful revelations made that night. A careful inspection of the papers left by Francis Fleury, showed that she was really his own daughter, and not, as Frank Lightfoot first suspected, the missing child of the murdered Courtrights.

The whole truth of that tragedy in Lone Cabin Gulch was never known—will never be known until the last day comes to clear away all clouds and mists.

Whether Francis Fleury stole away the child, to guard against her ever appearing to dispute his claim to the fortune which was left to Edna Irving and her heirs; whether William Courtright, fleeing from the sight of his brother's happiness, from the woman whom he had hoped to win for himself as a wife, from the frightful temptation to which he had once so nearly yielded—whether he had stolen the child to torture their hearts, before he heard of that horrible tragedy; or, having learned of it, with the terrible addition that he stood branded as the assassin, he took her away when he fled to save his life; which of all these might be the correct solution, was a mystery then, is a mystery now, and a mystery it will in all probability remain until the end of time!

To lay the ghost of a doubt forever, Jeter Burgess did not rest until he had proved his identity beyond the possibility of a doubt.

He had been a suitor for Edna Irving's hand at the time when Calvin Apperley was rejected. Less than a month afterward, he suffered the same fate, and, like Apperley, he left that part of the country to seek solace and forgetfulness in other climes. There he met his fate, and married; but he never forgot his first love, and when her name was spoken—when her terrible fate was recalled so abruptly, it brought on an attack of heart disease, to which he was slightly subject.

Of course Frank Lightfoot was duly humbled; of course he begged pardon for taking an honest gentleman for a vile criminal, and equally of course he had the fair Mora to plead for that pardon with him. Of course, too, pardon was granted. And then a still greater boon—but why speak of that? All the mining world knows that the Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death Mine is being operated by the firm of Apperley & Varney, with Aristabulus Boythorn, Esquire, as superintendent. And all of their particular friends know that Mora Burgess and Cleonice Lyon have a moral as well as legal right to call themselves "sleeping partners" in that firm.

Nothing was ever heard of William Courtright, and it is not known whether he is living or dead. But the gentle tourist who wanders in the Blackhawk Region, to this day is regaled with the strange, dark mystery of Lone Cabin Gulch.

THE END.

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